

THE SABBATH AS A STAIRWAY OF TRUST: GLIMPING THE HEAVENLY
THROUGH EARTHLY REST. (A MODEL FOR SABBATH KEEPING)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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MAY 2012

To Mary – my beloved wife

You are the world's greatest supporter for me.

You are the world to me.

You complete me.

To: Amelia, Aaron, and Clarissa,

You are all my wonderful children, and daddy will always love you all.

Always.

Then he said to them, "*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28, NAS)

"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9, NAS)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will like to give thanks to all who have contributed significantly to the completion of this dissertation. Without knowing the Lord Jesus, this project will never have been started in the first place! Thanks to my mentors Dr Haddon Robinson and Ray Blunt for their patience in answering questions, their encouragement in their pastoral attitude, and their willingness to supervise me throughout the writing of this dissertation. Besides Haddon and Ray, I thank Dr Will Messenger, Dr David Gill, Dr Dennis Hollinger, and various instructors at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for their professional commitment and academic excellence throughout the entire Faith in the Workplace and Leadership Ethics course. Thanks also go to the Bridget, Brian, and many in the DMin office working behind the scenes. I want to acknowledge the many hosts who have provided a glimpse of what it means to exercise faith in the workplace. I thank my DMin cohort of 2008-2010. We have enjoyed one another's company and loads of fun together.

I thank my congregation at Lord's Peace Chapel (Vancouver, British Columbia), the Oasis group at Covenant Community Methodist Church (Singapore), and many others who have supported me in many different ways. Thanks for letting me pastor and lead you all. I appreciate all of your prayers.

Last but not least, I thank my wife, Mary for her unwavering support throughout this journey, and my three children, Amelia, Aaron and Clarissa. You are all greatly loved. Yes, daddy will stop pursuing another degree, at least for now!

ABSTRACT

"What are we to do with the Sabbath, during the Sabbath, and about the Sabbath?" This is the key question that pops up the moment we allocate the space for Sabbath. This thesis is an attempt to shed some light on seeing the Sabbath as more than a holiday or a day of leisure, a day of worship, or a day of strict rituals. The Sabbath is a moment in time where creation steps back to render thanks for the past week, to express gladness for the present, and to cultivate hopefulness in the future. Underlying these dispositions is a fundamental motif of freedom. The Sabbath is an important expression of saying to the world of work, leisure, or new age spirituality: *"You shall have no idolatrous hold on my life!"* It is a freedom from keeping strict laws, and for experiencing the joy of living in God. Created for man, the Sabbath can be recovered to be that opportunity to freely rest, freely share and care, freely worship, and also freely give. Sabbath is an opportunity to be who God has made man to be. Free from the world of bondage. Free from the burdens of self-expectations and the pursuit of idolatry. Sabbath is not about stopping to ask for stuff, or things to do in order to enjoy life better. It is the freedom to recognize a life in Christ, to glimpse the heavenly future in order to enjoy all things, past, present, and future. In the spirit of such a freedom, it is the intent of this thesis to demonstrate that there is a need to have some disciplined ritual as part of an intentional Sabbath-keeping a day a week. Using the model, it is hoped that such rituals will then translate into a rhythmic practice of work and rest, which culminates in celebrating the heavenly rest of God. In God's time.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

One of the problems facing many Christians is the dichotomy of faith and work. This problem can also be described as a “challenge of fusing Christian values with business life.”¹ The cry for integrated living of faith and work is loud. People of faith want to be authentic in their living, be effective in working, and be satisfied in their results. So they work hard. They try to work smart. They struggle to balance their responsibilities. At the end of the week, they want to take a well-deserved break, often not wishing to let the public world interfere with their private domain. Many welcome “*Thank God it’s Friday*” as they close the busy and exhausting week, to usher in the start of a more leisurely-paced weekend. Between “*Thank God it’s Friday*” and “*Oh No! It’s Monday*,” the pace of life slows down noticeably. All over the city, people migrate from office to leisure centers. Parents replace office time with family time. As the secular world of work fades away, the spotlight shines on something more sacred, something more spiritual. Monotheists like Muslims adopt Fridays for their day of prayer. Jews

¹ Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), ix.

keep the Sabbath on Saturdays. Many Christians observe the Lord's Day on Sundays. While it is a different day of worship, the purpose is starkly similar: Lowly humans worshiping the God on High. Even secular people have their own versions of non-work activities, like sleep or recreation. Unfortunately, many who rush into the weekend, race through the weekend, only to rush out back to the next week. "*Weekend flies! What have we done?*" is a common response. Some, not knowing what to do with the weekend ends up extending the work-week to seven days or beyond. There are popular humorous quips that say things like: "*Seven days without rest makes one weak,*" or "*Seven days of work makes one weak.*" If people are not sure what to do with their weekend, chances are, they will let the weekdays inform their weekend agenda. Eventually, they reach a breaking point that demonstrates that all work and no rest makes one dull, exhausted, and burnt out. With no joy at work, no time for leisure, and no purpose in life, what is there to hope for or to delight in? Heschel has painted this brilliantly:

To the biblical mind, however, labor is the means toward an end, and the Sabbath as a day of rest, as a day of abstaining from toil, is not for the purpose of recovering one's lost strength and becoming fit for the forthcoming labor. The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life. Man is not a beast of burden, and the Sabbath is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of his work.²

Assuming there is a particular day of rest, what then does one do with it? Is there any guidance at all? How does one connect six days of work meaningfully with one day of rest? For six days, Christians want to be better believers in the marketplace, and still

² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (NY: FSG Classics, 2005), 14.

do a good job. They want to be effective, and still be faithful in their spiritual devotion to God. On the seventh day, what then do they do? Unfortunately, many unwittingly disregard the essence of Sabbath keeping either through ignorance, misinformation, or downright busyness, blaming things like technology, their work demands, or other pressures of life. If Christians understand the significance of the Sabbath, chances are, they will be more intentional about keeping it.

In order to understand the importance of the Sabbath Day, it is crucial to understand the contexts surrounding the busy workweek. Every week, there are at least five formidable foes that challenge the restless human soul. The first four lists WHY people need help. The fifth one lists challenges for groups trying to help.

Firstly, the world is a very *noisy* place. In a busy world, peace and quietness is not always possible. For all its marvellous advances, technology has only created a larger symphony of noise devices that are not just audible but portable. Modern electronic gadgets are able to make faster connections, sharper sounds, and more powerful audio-visual effects. In fact, technological advancements tend to speed up the pace of boredom. An attention-deficit society is easily enticed by the decibels of “newer-is-better,” and the seductive tones from the “latest-is-greatest”. In gaining that little extra mileage, one potentially stands to lose something substantially greater: Sense of being. For instance, the scandalous reversal can happen. In trying to conquer the work without due consideration of our own limitations, we end up letting the work control us. Noises blur own sense of identity.

When one is physically exhausted, such noises make one lament about the good old days. Several decades ago, people actually talked to their neighbours casually instead of driving past one another daily. It makes one yearn for the days of old where life seemed pretty much “simpler.” Unfortunately, one car honk, one email beep, or one cell-phone ring, is enough to snap one out of any nostalgia of old. In the aftermath of a rude awakening, the sense of bliss is disrupted. The effort to rest is interrupted. We can slam the door shut. We can lock the front gates. We can even drive to a place far away. Yet, sound travels through the shut door. Radio waves invade the house gates. Noises enter everywhere uninvited, unrelenting, and unsuspecting. We can lock the world out, but there is an inner world within us that is not easily locked out. Donna Schaper describes this as a world that urges one to “go faster, to do more.”³ Is quietness possible, or are we in danger of being enslaved by noises perpetually? Part of this problem is due to a sense of insecurity amid an “uncertain economy.”⁴ Noises confuse. Can we refuse them?

Secondly, the world is an arena of distractions. Distractions tend to make us less able to prioritize what we need to do most. It may even put the work above our personal well-being. A person bent on good works cannot be effective if he or she is ill. There are many things that cry out for our attention. Like a modern Alice-in-Wonderland, restaurants call out: “Eat here.” Grocery stores shout: “Buy here.” Gas stations invite us: “Fill up here.” There is an alarming potpourri of choices available for

³ Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Keeping*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999), xi.

⁴ Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday – The American Sunday*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 15

everything. Since the early 20th Century, things like “concerts, games, entertainments, excursions, social parties intrusion of Sunday papers” are known to disrupt a supposedly day of rest.⁵ In the age of modern technological revolution, it has certainly gotten worse, so bad that Dawn calls our society utterly “fettered” thanks to powers such as “technology,” “money,” “consumerism,” “deceptive communications, media hype, and information glut.”⁶ Such an environment makes one very busy, fettered, and trying to carve a time to rest is already an effort in itself. How then do we choose? What are the criteria? Who do we listen to? Not knowing how to choose, some unwittingly let the choices decide for them. Tour groups have special packages. Restaurants have special dishes for the day. Educational institutions have set curriculum. In a cost-conscious world, people are using cost increasingly as an overriding factor in all of their choices. Instead of people exercising mastery over the variety of choices, intrinsically, there is a sense of enslavement. When one does not know how to choose, it is likely that the choices choose them. Which job to take? What shall one eat? Which school to go to? What is the best way to work on this project? Which Church should I go to this week? Do we make choices or do choices make us? Where is the sense of identity? Are we enslaved by choices? Distractions not only sway us away from our most important priorities. They jolt our sense of identity, even an acute identity crisis. We are most vulnerable when we have no time to reflect or to take stock of our lives. Stephen Covey

⁵ Alexander Jackson, “Ominous Social Phenomena of Today Associated with Want of Sunday Rest,” in *Sunday Rest in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Alexander Jackson (Cleveland, OH: IFSRAA, 1905), 66.

⁶ Marva Dawn, *Unfettered Hope*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), xx.

argues for the use of the “compass” paradigm instead of the “clock.”⁷ Without rest, we will find it more difficult to disconnect ourselves from the “clock” paradigm. Just like the way the Israelites have been freed from Egyptian captivity, modern people need to be free from the distractions of the world that seek to overwhelm us, and thwart our ability to discern the important from the urgent. Perhaps, the problem is less about external distraction per se, but more the internal person in us that is easily distracted.

Thirdly, the world is stuffed with erroneous paradigms that are hard to keep out. Is more necessarily better? Is less even acceptable? Is cheap stuff reliable? Are people compromising quality carelessly? Organizations are growing lean and mean. Businesses are cutting costs. Less people are doing more work. Efficiency and productivity is seen as must-have standard way of life. What if such paradigms infiltrate the pulpit or one’s spiritual life? Is your prayer working at all? Can churches survive on half the salary and grow at twice the rate? Can spiritual work become more productive with fewer clergy people, more efficient with less money, and harvest greater numbers of people with less resources? By letting worldliness in, has the Church unwittingly pushed the Holy Spirit out? By buying into false teachings, are believers selling themselves out? The world is increasingly dominated by technology that has accelerated the confusion and the enslavement. Technology while it has advanced considerably since the beginning of the 20th Century, it is playing havoc on the human inner being. In Paul Tillich’s book on the technical society, “technology” is listed as one of the three most powerful “spiritual

⁷ Stephen Covey, *First Things First*, (New York, NY: Fireside, 1995), 12.

forces.”⁸ It is so potent that it is able to manoeuvre nature and stunt its natural growth.⁹

So serious is the effect of a technological society that some such as Dawn have targeted technology as one of the culprits for making us “overwhelmed.”¹⁰ She names it as “we are being enslaved by our society’s paradigm.”¹¹ Are we being enslaved by the world’s paradigms? Have we subtly allowed the world to influence the Church instead of the Church influencing the world? We want to be free but how can we do that?

Fourthly, inner restlessness remains a big problem. Bacchiocchi sees this as a human symptom arising out of a “deeper search,” a “search for meaning.”¹² It is this urge to search for one’s roots that keeps a person constantly searching and restless. Closely linked to this restlessness is a loss of understanding the place of one’s creativity. Murray Jardine says that people have “tremendous creative powers” but are utterly clueless about their usage.¹³ There is a lack of guidance pertaining to spiritual direction. If such a symptom become widespread, will it not become a case of the blind leading the blind? If one is not well rested, how can one teach others to rest? If one is not intentional with one’s own life, how can one guide others to be more intentional? Restlessness affects everyone, thus anyone seeking to help others to rest well, needs to

⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), xiii.

⁹ Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation*, 52.

¹⁰ Marva Dawn, *Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society*, (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 41.

¹¹ Dawn, *Unfettered Hope*, xv.

¹² Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 14.

¹³ Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity From Itself*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 9.

learn to rest well first. If we are able to cultivate a deeper sense of restfulness, we can reverse the downward spiral of restlessness. Sabbath as “stopping” stops restlessness momentarily. In such a state, we are vulnerable to any winds of change. Can we be intentional about changing for the better?

Fifthly, there is a gap between the people helpers and the people needing help. We need spiritual hubs to help connect to one another. Just like the need to integrate faith and work, one needs to integrate their sense of worth, with their versions of work. Being aware of a need for faith-work integration is not enough. People need practical help too. This cannot be limited to external help like conferences, seminars or training sessions. Inner work has to be done. Role models are needed. Every workplace is unique. Every person is different. Practicing Sabbath is not about immersing oneself with spiritual bliss on a rest day, in order to rough it out on the other six days. Such rituals will eventually wear themselves out if there is no intentionality. Eugene Peterson is particularly concerned about people who use seminars as if they are spiritual gas stations when they run out of motivational fuel.¹⁴

Even books that try to help do not go far enough.¹⁵ Bridges have to be built between the need and the resources. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix for the journey of life. Speedy solutions may work in vending machines, or computer gadgets, but not in

¹⁴ Eugene Peterson, *The Wisdom of Each Other*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 12.

¹⁵ Laura Nash & Scotty McLennan, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

human beings. Human beings cannot be measured in “superlatives,” as described by

Henri Nouwen:

In this success-oriented world, our lives become more and more dominated by superlatives. We brag about the highest tower, the fastest runner, the tallest man, the longest bridge, and the best student. (In Holland we brag in reverse: we have the smallest town, the narrowest street, the tiniest house, and the most uncomfortable shoes.) But underneath all our emphasis on successful action, many of us suffer from a deep-seated, low self-esteem and are walking around with the constant fear that someday someone will unmask the illusion and show that we are not as smart, as good, or as lovable as the world was made to believe.¹⁶

Any theology of work without a theology of rest is incomplete. Any theology of rest that is measured like the other six days is indiscreet. We need a theology of Sabbath that lifts us free from worldliness, and away from restlessness. Let work be work. Let rest be rest. Let Sabbath be Sabbath that leads us to something more, to someone Greater. As Abraham Heschel eloquently describes in his book, “Sabbath,” this is a symptom of man unable to distinguish the world of “space” instead of “time.” In observing that the Sabbath is “an atmosphere” rather than “space,”¹⁷ Heschel advocates that the greatest need for man is to be free from the entangling “technical civilization” that man is in.¹⁸

There is a necessary pattern of work and rest. Dissolving the distinction means dissolving our effectiveness as humans. A theology of Sabbath needs a movement in

¹⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁷ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1952), 21.

¹⁸ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 28.

time. Through such a movement, one learns to see the Kingdom revealing Christ more and more, and our worldliness less and less. By taking a fresh look at both the Old and New Testaments, it is hoped that one will be able to see how each practice of the Sabbath foreshadows a hope that is to come in Christ. This does not mean that every Sabbath Day brings us a spiritual high, or establish an eschatological milestone. Neither does this mean that every Sabbath rhythm automatically instils calm and rest. Rather, the hope is that practicing the Sabbath, prepares one to start cultivating a spiritual disposition of watchfulness that is active, not passive, dynamic not static.

Jesus tells his disciples that the truth shall set them free.¹⁹ Through his life on earth, Jesus has consistently shown that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.²⁰ When confronting the law keepers and accusers like the Pharisees on the area of keeping the Sabbath, Jesus reminds the listeners that the Sabbath is made for man, and not the other way round. Paul reminds the Church at Rome, “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

Thus, the Old and the New Testaments repeatedly asserts this notion of being free in God, and in Christ. Why then are many people living like slaves in the world? The pattern of the world of the Old Testament is remarkably similar to that of the modern world. The Israelites despite being redeemed from slavery in Egypt, are still enslaved by an “Egyptian mindset.” This is evident from their repeated cries to go back to Egypt,

¹⁹ John 8:32.

²⁰ John 14:6.

even after they have been freed from Egypt!²¹ In many ways today, the sad state remains very true. It is far easier to remove Israel from the clutches of Egyptian slavery, then for Israel to remove remnants of Egypt from their hearts. It is already bad to be physically enslaved in Egypt. What is worse is the willingness to be enslaved by Egypt! It is like the story in the Steven Spielberg movie "*Saving Private Ryan*," where after sacrificing many soldiers to rescue Private Ryan, Ryan the rescued does not want to leave with the rescuers! In our modern world, such a pattern continues. Though free in Christ, why are they living like slaves to the world of work and of worry. Worse, are believers unwittingly being enslaved by erroneous paradigms, without them even knowing it? Is there any space one can carve out to restore one's sense of purpose, of direction, and of identity?

Looking back to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 5), it is the intention of this thesis-project to re-ignite a purposefulness to "Sabbath freely" without guilt about leaving the work or worldliness that entangles. Looking forward through the lens of Hebrews 4, the author hopes to weave in a conscientious observance of rest and rhythm that becomes a *way of life* as the pilgrim journeys toward the heavenly rest.

Chapter 2 of this project will study the use of the Sabbath and highlight some themes. It will also make brief references to Jesus' use of the Sabbath in the New Testament, with a particular interest on the "heavenly rest" theme. It will incorporate word studies to illuminate the use of the word "sabbath." It will attempt to let

²¹ Exodus 14:12; Numbers 14:3; Acts 7:39.

theologians converse with one another about Sabbath rest. It will seek to lead the reader to see a Sabbath that is beyond mere resting, stopping, or simply a recharging station for the next workday. There will also be a discussion on the question: “What are we to do with the Sabbath, and during the Sabbath?” It deals with the theological aspect of Sabbath rest; that it is necessary to make a concerted attempt to step back from the world on a periodic basis. It will consider the Sabbath as personal devotional rest, as community rituals as well as sabbatical rhythms throughout the week.

Chapter 3 presents a brief survey of current Sabbath literature, and how this project can move the discussion forward. The large amount of materials in the market can be daunting. The literature will be examined and discussed for themes pertaining to rest, freedom, creation, delight, worship, eschatological hope, and practical living. That said, this project adopts the well-known kingdom understanding of “already” and “not-yet” perspective.²² In other words, the Sabbath is in a way already fulfilled in Christ in his first coming, but yet there is a coming rest in God as depicted in Hebrews 4:8-11.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

In chapter 4, there will be interviews of a focus group of individuals from various churches. The results will be examined. It touches on the feedback, to gather a snapshot

²² Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 19.

of the various understanding of Sabbath observance from a range of evangelical communities.

In Chapter 5, a working model for practicing Sabbath will be proposed. Called the “Stairway of Trust,” it will attempt to consolidate the biblical and theological themes, some of the literature survey work, as well as practical considerations. A Curriculum will be drawn out from it that covers three stages. The first stage is called the “child stage” where Sabbath practice is the strict adherence to a weekly time of abstinence from work. One learns through practical steps to be free to say “*It is enough*” to work, no matter how virtuous it may be. Regular practicing of this stage will prepare one toward growth. The second stage is an “adolescent stage,” where the regular Sabbath time has moved from rigid adherence to restful appreciation. Rhythms of Sabbath keeping have then become a large part of one’s life. Some exercises will be proposed to help participants discover that Sabbath keeping is more than just rest, relaxation, or rigid rituals. There is an intentional movement of freedom. Keeping the Sabbath consistently at an “adolescent stage” will help one grow toward the “adult stages.” At this stage, one practices Sabbath not as a ritual but a delight. One enjoys the Sabbath, and through the Sabbath keeping, enjoys the world of work. There is beauty in simplicity, and simplicity in beauty. One anticipates hope.

Sabbath frees one to disengage from the world without guilt. Sabbath frees one to play in a different domain. Most importantly, Sabbath enables the whole person to glimpse of a foreshadowing of a future rest in God. In Sabbath, we see a kingdom that is

already here, and not fully here yet. With Sabbath as freedom, one needs not fret on what or what not to do. Instead of rushing in and out of Sabbath, one learns to ease out from the world without feeling guilty about it, and gradually ease back with a sense of purpose. A theology of work with a theology of the Sabbath makes one complete whole week. Most importantly, those who “Sabbath freely” will grow in confidence that the works and the world do not define the significance of a person. Those who Sabbath regularly can practice an intentional stance beyond rituals, beyond rest, beyond rhythms, and beyond restrictions from work. Unhurried, unfrenzied, one becomes free to thirst after God more and more, as the Day approaches. If the reader is interested, the model can be previewed at the Appendix section of this dissertation. While the author is not going to cover all of the verses in the Bible relating to the Sabbath, it is hoped that through the selected passages, the reader will be able to sense a movement of freedom that bridges a looking-backward attitude of remembrance, and a looking-forward anticipation of heavenly rest. When the motivation for the Kingdom is established, and if Sabbath keeping can become a window to that heavenly rest, it is believed that the model will encourage believers to take their Sabbaths more seriously and also joyously.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL / THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

God having finished His works, ... speaks, ' . . . Therefore nothing is lacking, but everything that is necessary for this bodily, or temporal, life is supplied in great plenty. So then I will observe the Sabbath.'¹

- Martin Luther

What does the Sabbath mean to people living in a busy and noisy world? At first look, it appears to be one of taking a temporary respite from the madness of the world of rush. In contrast, the Bible reveals that the Sabbath is more than sipping rum on the beach, or rendering worship rituals in a congregation. It is more than simply a day to recharge ourselves in order to charge back out into another mad week. In Genesis, it means a delightful completion of a splendid week. From Luther's commentary in Genesis 1, whatever man needs on this earth, God has already provided. The creation mandate of God's rest is in itself a divine satisfaction that what is necessary has been fully made available to all of creation. There is more than enough for everyone. Much more. If that is the case, why rush? Why worry? Why work as if there is no tomorrow?

In this chapter, the understanding of the Sabbath in both the Old and New Testaments will highlight several important themes leading to a better understanding of

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Commentary on Genesis*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 37.

the Sabbath. Firstly, the work of God is complete. Beginning with Genesis 2:2-3, the word “shavat” [שָׁבַת] is used as a verb, meaning to rest, or to cease. The LORD completes “all of his work.” Luther comments that when God rested, that does not mean He stopped preserving or ceased ruling over the earth. God simply “did not create” another heaven or earth.² Genesis 2:2 is emphatic about the work being completed by mentioning the work “asa” twice. Genesis 2:3 represents a perfect creation that leads to a perfect closure of all his creative work. God blesses the seventh day, God consecrates this day, and God rested from all his work. This act of completion stretches far and wide, such as improved living conditions, land benefits, restored relationships, and perfection. Lowery connects this Sabbath rest to improving human living conditions, arguing that the Old Testament usage of Sabbath and Jubilee are divine patterns to “protest conditions of scarcity, overwork, and economic inequality.”³ Rest includes both man and land. Chris Wright brings this further to say that Sabbath rest for humans leads to benefits for the land too.⁴ Karin Boisclair-Joly extends the purpose of Sabbath to a restoration of relationships “between people, between the land and its caretakers, and ultimately, we hope, between the creation and its creator.”⁵ The seventh day of rest and gladness complements the 6 days of creative work. Seven is

² Luther, *Genesis*, 38.

³ Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 3.

⁴ Chris Wright, “Sabbath for the Land and Jubilee,” in *Caring for Creation*, ed. Sarah Tillet, (Elsfield Way, Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2005), 55-61.

⁵ Karin Boisclair-Joly, “Can There be a Sabbath for Marshland?” in *Caring for Creation*, ed. Sarah Tillet, (Elsfield Way, Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2005), 62-64.

often regarded as the number for perfection.⁶ Full and complete. This is not the end, but the beginning of the Sabbath revelation. In other words, completing the perfect seven days of creation does not mean God has stopped his creative brilliance. Creativity in itself is never static but dynamic. Such dynamism is seen as Luther connects the Sabbath rest of God with the “benefit” to mankind, chiefly to “grow in the knowledge of God.”⁷ Creativity and completion seen through the eyes of eternity and immortality is like a ring without end, yet makes one full complete circle. Luther likens this rest of God being eternal, to the “immortality of man” as depicted in Hebrews 3:18.⁸ Ross says that the Seventh Day of creation is special primarily because it is a day of “celebration” over the completion of creation, rather than a “rest from labor.”⁹ Although the word “Shabbat” can be translated either “rest” or “cease,” Allen Ross opts for “ceased” (from a war), rather than “rest” (from relaxation and refreshment).¹⁰ For Ross, the Sabbath is more than simply a recess from a busy workday. The “number seven” indicates completion and the resting is not a form of needing to “restore his energy by resting.”¹¹ God rested because all his work has been perfectly completed. Hebrews 4:8-11 gives believers a glimpse into this perfection, to “enter into the Sabbath rest spiritually.”¹² Like Luther, Ross recognizes the Sabbath as being a significant milestone in the perfect creation of

⁶ Yizhak Heinemann and Isaac Heinemann, *The Reasons For The Commandments In Jewish Thought* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 79.

⁷ Luther, *Genesis*, 41.

⁸ Luther, *Genesis*, 41.

⁹ Allen Ross, *Genesis: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary Vol 1*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 41.

¹⁰ Ross, *Genesis*, 41.

¹¹ Ross, *Genesis*, 41.

¹² Ross, *Genesis*, 41.

God, and the opportunity for believers to journey and enter into the perfect rest of God. In entering such a rest, the Sabbath needs to be seen in a different dimension. Von Rad gives a similar interpretation that “rest” here refers to a world that is “no longer in process of being created.”¹³ Moreover, the Genesis 3 texts points to “rest” that “existed before man” and whether man “perceives” it or not does not diminish its existence.¹⁴ If God’s work has been complete, what then is the purpose of the Sabbath? Is it an appreciation and enjoying of creation?

Honouring God is a second theme. Like a well-done pat from a grateful boss, the worker celebrates and enjoys the fulfilment of a milestone. For one who has faithfully discharged his best during the week, the Sabbath is a time to give thanks, be grateful, and to step back to honour God. This is what some commentators like Oswalt suggest. According to Oswalt, the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 is a way of “*bringing honor*” to God via a unique manner that time is understood.¹⁵ He makes several pertinent observations that Sabbath is more than mere resting from busy work. Sabbath means “we are not self-originating, self-sustaining, or self-authenticating.”¹⁶ [Man is not his own boss.] It means we undermine our true worth when we fail to recognize that Sabbath is a gift for us to be appreciative of the Creator God, and to use this time to “reorient our compass.”¹⁷ [Everything man has is a gift from God.] It is a day that is

¹³ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis – a Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 60.

¹⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 60.

¹⁵ John N. Oswalt, *Exodus: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary Vol 1*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 444.

¹⁶ Oswalt, *Exodus*, 444.

¹⁷ Oswalt, *Exodus*, 444.

“different from all the rest” lest we be in danger of letting the world minimize God and push the Creator to the background.¹⁸ [Man is not to usurp God’s position.] In doing so, we will become unwitting participants to let creation “see him as less than he is.”¹⁹ [Man is to let God be God.]

Thirdly, there is an interesting grammatical shift in the revelatory meaning of the Sabbath, suggesting a “movement” motif. This next occurrence of the word “Sabbath” is in Exodus 16:23-29 and Exodus 20:8-11. Instead of verbs (God rested), the word for “Sabbath” has moved to nouns exclusively (observe the Sabbath). In Exodus 16:23, “shabaton” is used twice, the first time as “sabbath observance,” and the second as “holy day.” For Exodus 16:23-29, the word “Shabbat” is used 5 times, all as nouns. In Exodus 20:8-11, this pattern continues, where the “Shabbat” is enshrined in the Ten Commandments. The progression to “Sabbath” as a verb for the people to obey comes in Exodus 34:21. Frethem sees this shift of “Sabbath-keeping” becoming an act of creation-keeping.”²⁰ Childs notices a shift of commands, from a negative “you shall not work” (Exodus 20:7) to a more positive “you shall work” in Exodus 23:12.²¹ For Childs, it is important not to be too caught up in the positive-ness or negative-ness of the commands. What is more important is the way the commands distil the essence of the Sabbath into practical forms that are clear and non-contradictory. He asserts that both

¹⁸ Oswalt, *Exodus*, 444.

¹⁹ Oswalt, *Exodus*, 444.

²⁰ Terence E. Frethem, *Exodus*, (Louisville: KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 230.

²¹ Brevard Childs, *Exodus, A Commentary*, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974), 414.

commands are actually “two sides of the same coin.”²² This makes a strong case that the Sabbath as revealed in the Old Testament passages are very much revelation in progress. Hebrews 4:9 gives us an explicit reference, that entering God’s rest is very much a work in progress. Philip Hughes describes this rest as something yet to happen, as belonging to a “new heaven and new earth.”²³ Yet, the believer needs not fret about the not-yet element. F. F. Bruce gives a very encouraging “already” possible exhortation, saying that “by faith they may live in the good of it here and now.”²⁴ Thus we see an interesting interplay of the “already-not-yet” paradigm. Thomas Long highlights three themes in the heavenly rest in Hebrews. The “rest” refers to firstly the “beginning of time,” secondly, it points to “end of time,” and thirdly, as in the “middle of time.”²⁵ He uses the “already—not-yet” paradigm by exhorting the Sabbath as one to be “remembered with thanksgiving and anticipated with hope.”²⁶ There is a continuing shift of God revealing more of His glory, and the Sabbath is one important avenue for that. This revelation is interesting as the Fourth Commandment in Deuteronomy is not only part of the second reading of the Law, it is also the longest. There seems to be a repetition and exposition of the Sabbath for Israel’s ears. Using the literary tools of repetition and revelation, the commands calls for a Sabbath observance that is beyond a day of rest, beyond the individual, and the individual’s family. It extends far out to the

²² Childs, *Exodus*, 415.

²³ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 161.

²⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 110.

²⁵ Thomas Long, *Interpretation Hebrews* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997) 55.

²⁶ Long, *Interpretation Hebrews*, 55.

rest of the slaves, the animals and reminds Israel that this progression, this movement and revelation has a grander vision. This revelation goes farther. Childs sees the Deuteronomy's concern being extended from "primarily humanitarian" to "theological."²⁷ This is striking because by keeping the Sabbath, Israel is called to recognize that the world is larger. They are not to be too self-focused on their petty world that they lose sight of God's concerns for the world. Childs adds another insight to the shift of Sabbath practice. In contrast to any understanding that the Old Testament is mostly about following after rigid rules, a careful reading reveals God supplying a motivation for obeying the Fourth Commandment. As Israel has been freed, live freely, and let others live freely too. This essence of freedom is the next theme. Thus, slaves ought to be allowed to observe the Sabbath, just like the rest of the nation.²⁸

Fourthly, freedom is a major motif in the keeping of the Sabbath. For six days man have pursued after significance in work. Six days they have tirelessly sought after good deeds, as an effort to make some meaning out of their lives. Six days they have engaged the world through work, play, and all kinds of human activities. On the Seventh Day, they are free to stop doing all of that. The Sabbath is a sign of freedom from idolatry. The reason why Israel continued to wander in the wilderness in the past, is because though physically they have been delivered out of Egypt, they refuse to remove Egypt out of their hearts. The wilderness wandering is a "learning process" for a nation

²⁷ Childs, *Exodus*, 417.

²⁸ Childs, *Exodus*, 417.

“bound for freedom.”²⁹ One of the most memorable events in Jewish history is the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. So significant that the biblical writers refer to this event frequently throughout the Bible. The Torah (Pentateuch), the Nevi'im (Prophets), the Kethuvim (Psalms), the gospels, the Apostles in New Testament times, as well as modern Jewish academic literature. In many Jewish communities, the exodus is an event “recounted daily in Jewish prayers.”³⁰ It is a reminder of how the Jews experience freedom from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. More particularly, it is to tell generations over and over again, that it is not the exodus per se, but God who delivered the Jews. Both the exodus and the keeping of the Sabbath are carefully inscribed in the longest commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Beginning with a call to “observe the Sabbath,” the biblical writer lists at least 3 reasons why the Sabbath needs to be kept. Firstly, it is an explicit command (Deuteronomy 5:12b). Secondly, it is a reminder of how the Creator of all things has worked six days and rested on the seventh day (Deuteronomy 5:13-14a). It calls one to grant freedom to self, the household, animals, and slaves so that all may rest on that day. Thirdly, it describes the Jewish exodus from Egypt and the keeping of the Sabbath in one verse: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

²⁹ Goran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1999), 112.

³⁰ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Exodus*, The Jewish Study Bible, eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004, 106.

In one verse, the exodus and the keeping of the Sabbath are combined to demonstrate two truths: Freedom from slavery, and freedom to fully observe God's command. Larsson sees the extension of freedom as something extremely far reaching. It reminds Israel that the reason why Israel is saved is to deliver others and not "abuse them as Pharaoh did."³¹ In other words, the keeping of the Sabbath frees one to free others. In order to free others, one must first be freed. One must regularly remember that they are free, and that they are already freed. Forgetting this truth is a sad case of ignorance. Pity the man who is already saved, who lives as if he is still trapped.

Fifth, keeping the Sabbath maintains a mark of identity. The Zionist philosopher, Ahad Ha-'Am comments that "Even more than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath preserved the Jews."³² Without a doubt, the keeping of the Sabbath is a mark of the Jewish people. Heschel relates this kind of "Jewishness" as beyond "beliefs and rituals, more than what was compressed into tenets and rules."³³ He adds that: "Jewishness was not in the fruit but in the sap that stirred through the tissues of the tree. Bred in the silence of the soil, it ascended to the leaves to become eloquent in the fruit. Jewishness was not only truth; it was vitality, joy; to some, the only joy. . . . 'It is a joy to be a Jew."³⁴

³¹ Goran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 129.

³² Ahad Ha'am, "Shabbat Ve-Tziyonut" (1898) in *Al Parashat Derakhim* (in Hebrew) (Berlin, 1904) 3:79.

³³ Abraham Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's and the Sabbath*, (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 21.

³⁴ Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 21.

There is something unique about the Decalogue in Deuteronomy when compared to the Exodus version. It is expanded. One sees how painstakingly the writer describes the contexts of the nation at that time. Through repetition, Walter Brueggemann notices how the understanding of the Sabbath has progressed from Genesis to Exodus, and from Exodus to Deuteronomy. People remember their history. People remember God. People remember their redemption. Their identity is associated with an event. While the Sabbath command in Genesis is grounded in creation rest, Exodus 20:8-11 is tied to the “exodus narrative.”³⁵ Calling this as “most important feature of this commandment,” Brueggemann asserts that the Sabbath is a point that is far beyond mere “productivity.”³⁶ Rather than let one’s work define one’s identity, Deuteronomy records God’s work to define the identity of the nation of Israel. In the Deuteronomy text, Brueggemann lists six distinct emphases of the Sabbath. It is observed that these produce a certain progression of thought. It is firstly to remember the exodus; secondly as a mark of “identity;” thirdly, as an “act of resistance;” fourthly, as an “alternative community;” fifth, as a protection of environment, and finally, as an “act of hope.”³⁷ Similarly, Mann has picked up the “positive order” of the fourth commandment, by posing the popular modern question: “What are you doing this weekend?”³⁸ Calling it a “biblical R & R,” Mann says that the Sabbath while it means different things to different people, detects a movement from “Rest and Relaxation” to

³⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 69.

³⁶ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 69.

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 73-74.

³⁸ Thomas W. Mann. *Deuteronomy*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 73.

"Rest and Remember."³⁹ Mann does not stop there. He continues to say that the reason why the Sabbath is observed has a certain sense of liberation from things of the world that binds us. He says that observing the Sabbath institutes two benefits: "social justice" and "personal spirituality."⁴⁰ One can conclude that if one has a firm sense of identity, the question about what to do on the Sabbath will slowly becomes irrelevant.

Sixth, there is an opportunity for celebration. Eugene Merrill also notices the contrasts between the Exodus and the Deuteronomy versions of the Sabbath command. While Exodus 20:8 uses the word "remember," Deuteronomy 5:12 uses the word "observe," indicating a progression from mere remembrance to active observance.⁴¹ Merrill makes a similar observation about the Sabbath progression in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy. In Genesis 2:2-3, "sabbat" is "to stop, cease, rest;" In Exodus 20:11, it is to be "set apart" for the LORD; In Deuteronomy 5:15, it is to "celebrate deliverance" from Egyptian slavery.⁴² This shift is a joyous shift, not a stoic observance. Merrill notes that the Sabbath now is one of "redemption and not creation, of rest and not cessation."⁴³ One stops not as to hide from the world, but to celebrate God's mighty work amid a restless world. One is free from the world, to celebrate while in the world. In Samuele Bacchiocchi's *"Divine Rest for Human Restlessness."* Bacchiocchi deals with the Sabbath on a step-by-step movement from restlessness to rest, beginning with creation, to care, to belonging, and finally to redemption. James Wesberry remarks that

³⁹ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 74-75.

⁴⁰ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

⁴¹ Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 150.

⁴² Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 150.

⁴³ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 152.

if there is an additional chapter for Bacchiocchi to write, it will be the “*Good News of the Resurrection*.”⁴⁴ Is that not a great reason to be celebrating each week? There is also a joy of obedience. Patrick Miller’s notices a reversal of commands from remembering in Exodus 20 to keeping in Deuteronomy 5. He says:

The simple structure of the Exodus form (20:8-11) is as follows: Remember the creating work of God and the rest of God; from that memory you are to rest and sanctify a day. Remembering the Lord’s work of creation that ended in a day of rest will lead you to keep a day of rest and to set it apart to the Lord. The Deuteronomic structure works differently. The creation dimension is omitted. In terms of the logic, it is not remember to keep but the reverse. Keep the Sabbath, and by so doing two purposes will be accomplished.⁴⁵

In other words, in Exodus, remembering is first, that leads to sanctification of the Seventh Day. In Deuteronomy, obedience takes precedence which leads to two further benefits, namely, rest and redemption.

Remembering the great mighty deliverance is a good reason to celebrate. It can be used to teach others. The precise day will suddenly seem less important, as long as one has a heart to celebrate. Nevertheless, it is useful to set aside a particular day, not for legalistic reasons but also theological. For this, Merrill asserts the choice of “Sunday” over “Saturday” is a significant because one’s celebration is based on the highlight of Christianity: The Resurrection of Christ. He agrees with Wesberry’s observation by putting the first day of the week as Sunday as to observe the Sabbath through

⁴⁴ James Wesberry, ‘Foreword’ in *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, 8.

⁴⁵ Patrick D. Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 80.

commemorating Christ's "triumphant victory over death."⁴⁶ One has been freed from death in sin, to life in Christ.

Finally, what is the most important thing to do during the Sabbath? For the Christian, Merrill states positively that the most important thing to do during the Sabbath is to celebrate this victory.⁴⁷ Mann extends this celebration toward worship. Thus, the seventh theme is to turn celebration into worship. Sabbath day is best used for both observing and remembering, where the latter is best exercised in the "context of public worship."⁴⁸ Over time, the practice of the Sabbath will lead to the formation of a society that is just as well as to lead one toward a deeper and personal devotional life.⁴⁹ Thus, the Sabbath is an opportunity to be holy, and to carve out intentional time for spiritual nourishment. Brueggemann warns against turning the Sabbath into another day of productivity, that the commandments of God as mere productivity tools. He words this strongly that "an unrestrained commitment to productivity has its counterpart in unrestrained violence and exploitation in which there is no fabric of respect or restraint."⁵⁰ He comprehensively links the Ten Commandments together, personal spirituality, and community living together, saying that all are inter-connected.

⁴⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 152.

⁴⁷ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 152.

⁴⁸ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 75.

⁴⁹ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

He writes: “Restraint on utility (vv.12-16) and restraint on violence and exploitation (vv.17-20) converge on the final prohibition against coveting (v.21).”⁵¹

Moving beyond what Merrill and Mann have suggested, Brueggemann weaves together the observing of the Sabbath as an important part in preventing the destruction of the “fabric of community.” How one personally observes the Sabbath has direct implications on how the community impacts the Sabbath. Brueggemann imaginatively suggests the adoption of a “Sabbath voice” that is “humble and gentle in heart, making no demands.”⁵² Instead of living a life that compels one to do things, to work too hard until one loses a sense of meaning and significance, Brueggemann calls us to live in congruence with our “true creatureliness” and “true vocation.”⁵³ Sabbath is about telling the truth, subverting a world of “acquisitiveness” and be “subverted by abundance and by freedom and by truth and by hope.”⁵⁴

Frethem calls the keeping of the Sabbath as a “religious act with cosmic implications.”⁵⁵ God by resting begins a “working/resting rhythm.”⁵⁶ This rhythm in turn enables creation to honour God. Honouring God leads to better care of creation. By allocating a day NOT to do any work, one actually helps “keep chaotic forces at bay.”⁵⁷ It provides for a “weekly oasis” not to simply take a break, but to be reminded of one

⁵¹ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

⁵² Walter Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 294.

⁵³ Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons*, 295.

⁵⁴ Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons*, 299.

⁵⁵ Frethem, *Exodus*, 229.

⁵⁶ Frethem, *Exodus*, 230.

⁵⁷ Frethem, *Exodus*, 230.

important reality: Any credit for any accomplishments belong solely to God.⁵⁸ He adds that: "The Sabbath is a fundamentally egalitarian institution. The Sabbath rest is for all, rich and poor, master and servant, human beings and animals. . . . This humanitarian concern of the Sabbath is a bridge to the commandments concerned with interhuman relationships."⁵⁹

Another reformer, John Calvin also mentions three things for the Christian to do on the Sabbath. Firstly, one ceases to do normal work, remembers the Sabbath as a "spiritual rest," and allows "God to work in them." Secondly, it should be a day to "hear the Law," and "perform religious rites." Thirdly, it is a day of freedom for slaves to have a day to themselves.⁶⁰ We note that there is also a progression in Calvin's thought with regards to the Sabbath as no longer simply a Jewish law to be kept by Christians, but sees the Sabbath as a precursor to the coming of Christ. In other words, the Sabbath is a day freely available for the Christian to look forward in hope to the Kingdom.

Eighthly, what does the New Testament says about the Sabbath? In the New Testament, there is a strong eschatological hope in the keeping and remembering of the Sabbath. The gospels record a contrast between an old and new interpretation of the Sabbath. In Matthew 12:1-8, the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the Sabbath law. In reply, Jesus reasons that the Sabbath is made for man, and not vice versa. At the same time, Jesus reveals himself as the ultimate Authority over the

⁵⁸ Frethem, *Exodus*, 230.

⁵⁹ Frethem, *Exodus*, 230.

⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book II.8.28.

Sabbath. While it may seem common sense that good works should not be forbidden on any day, Jesus is revealing that there is an “already” and “not-yet” dimension of the Sabbath law. If the purpose of resting in God is the ultimate goal, if Jesus is God, isn’t it more important to see the Creator behind the Laws, rather than to see the laws in front of the Creator? Why should anyone be so fixated at the curtain and forget about the heavenly rest behind the curtain? Jesus is very explicit when he says, “I tell you that one greater than the temple is here” (Matthew 12:6). Robert Gundry expresses Jesus’ presence in this verse as “God with us.”⁶¹ If this is an example of the “already come” component of the rest in God, Hebrews 4 shows the “not-yet” aspect. F.F. Bruce maintains that while Hebrews 4:13 is a call to be vigilant, to encourage, and to be steadfast in one’s faith, it is more importantly a call to listen for God’s voice and to “render Him heart-obedience.”⁶² He adds that the Hebrew text here is a further reminder for believers not just to “begin well” but to “stay the course and finish the race.”⁶³ This marvellously sums up the two-pronged understanding of the coming Kingdom with regards to the current and eventual Sabbath rest. Gundry notes that “Canaan” was not mentioned at all in Hebrews 4:1-11, meaning “God’s rest isn’t in Canaan.”⁶⁴ Neither was “wilderness” mentioned lest the Israelites remain fixated on the

⁶¹ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 49.

⁶² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1964), 67.

⁶³ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 68.

⁶⁴ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 881.

wilderness deliverance. Gundry writes: “So Canaan was only a pointer to God’s already existent heavenly rest.”⁶⁵

Keeping and remembering the Sabbath is but another “pointer” to an ultimate Sabbath. Johnstone puts it well when he uses the redaction criticism approach, that both D and P versions converges on the Sabbath. For D (Deuteronomy 5:15), it is a reminder of freedom. For P (Exodus 20:11), it is a balance of experiencing the present rest in the “perfection of creation,” and of being reminded of a promised land that is coming.⁶⁶ It is good to be reminded that the redaction approach essentially pieces together various materials that mature to eventually form a whole.

In summary, when one reads the Sabbath observance in the Old Testament, one recognizes that God’s work is already complete. What is needed is to live in a manner that recognizes this completed work. One sees that through a progression of revelation in honouring God, in freedom from slavery, in identity, in celebratory worship. In the New Testament, there is a further revelation of Sabbath keeping that is beyond earthly rest, beyond mere redemption, but ultimately to a heavenly rest. Interestingly, the passage in Hebrews 4:1-11 comes back full circle to warn believers about the consequences of a “disobedience.” The point is clear. Remember but do not be fixated on the past. Observe the Sabbath principle but do not see the redemptive element as an end in itself. Rest, but be attentive to a heavenly rest that is in God. Practically, one

⁶⁵ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 881.

⁶⁶ William Johnstone, “‘Part III Exodus’ in *Genesis and Exodus*, John W. Rogerson et al., (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 263.

needs to be freed from the devices of the world, erroneous theologies, and be liberated to pursue God. Fully and freely.

In addition to what has already mentioned, this is a question addressed differently by the various people. Brueggemann calls us toward resisting a day of “utility,” of “violence and exploitation.”⁶⁷ Failing which, there will be dire consequences not just for the person, but for both the community as well as the environment. He criticizes the American way of “self-serving extravagance” saying:

... it takes little imagination to see the connection between the self-serving extravagance of the consumer economy in an unfettered market economy and the rapid erosion of public institutions, to see that a mode of life committed solely to unrestrained productivity and acquisitiveness is indeed a recipe for death.⁶⁸

Mann and Miller, on the other hand, give a more optimistic outlook. Mann says that the Deuteronomy account, while a repetition, is also one of the “significant reinterpretations” of the fourth commandment.⁶⁹ He adds that the Israelites at that time are to use the Sabbath Day to remember where their nation comes from. The reason is simple. Mann writes: “If people work all week long [sic]. They do not have time to pause and remember the spiritual source that gave them life. Even recreation may not produce such memory. As one minister I know said to a parishioner: ‘Yes, you can worship God on the golf course, but will you?’”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 77-78.

⁶⁹ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 42.

⁷⁰ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 43.

Thus Mann insists that keeping the Sabbath comprised of two main activities: Doing things that firstly, help one to remember one's origins (identity motif), and secondly, to avoid getting sucked up by all-week long activities (freedom motif). Miller agrees but takes the point further. He points out several things that can be done. Firstly, it is to be received as a "gift from God" freely, and in response to use it to "bless human existence."⁷¹ This is a way to honour God. Secondly, fundamental to this gift is rest, with two opportunities to be blessed; namely to look backward to Exodus to remember how Israel has been redeemed, and to look "forward to the promised rest of God."⁷² Thirdly, keeping the Sabbath is a way to guard against the "idolizing of work."⁷³ Fourthly, it prevents one from using work to "justify oneself."⁷⁴ Fifthly, keeping the Sabbath is to be done together as a mark of common identity, that they are the people of God.⁷⁵

Merrill points out a liberation aspect to imitate. Just as God has freed them from Egyptian slavery, once a week, they are to behave likewise by giving their slaves freedom from work.⁷⁶ In terms of personal behaviour, they are to adopt a time to be consecrated, that to be holy like the Lord, on the Sabbath, they are to maintain a "way of thought and life that is above reproach."⁷⁷ In the next chapter, there will be more discussion on what to do on the Sabbath Day and what it means to move freely into the Sabbath, and with the hope of Sabbath in the heart as one re-enters the week.

⁷¹ Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, 81.

⁷² Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, 81.

⁷³ Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, 82.

⁷⁴ Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, 82.

⁷⁵ Miller, *Interpretation: Deuteronomy*, 83.

⁷⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 151.

⁷⁷ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 151.

This freedom aspect of keeping the Sabbath dovetails back into the gist of the Bible. It has been observed by Larsson, that the general layperson tends to read the Old and New Testament in a dichotomous manner. For example, things like the Old Testament teach law, while the New Testament offers grace; the former is salvation by works while the latter is by grace. Others include things like the Old Testament God is cruel and the New Testament God is All-Loving. This is not to be so. Larsson asserts correctly, that if the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament, and if God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, is it not true then, that salvation is for all?⁷⁸ Probably, the most sensible way to interpret the Sabbath passages is to see them as a three-phase revelation: what has happened (God's work is complete), what is happening (Man has been freed), and what is still to come (God's kingdom will come). There is one more thing. The Creation narrative in Genesis contains a curious pattern. For six days, the verses in Genesis 1 end with "and there was evening, and there was morning." (Gen 1:31) However, for the Seventh Day, when God rested from all His work, there is no mention of such. Is this not a clue that the Sabbath cannot be bounded by time? If that is the case, should not it be treated differently from the rest of the days? Just as God is not bounded to work, Sturcke points out that this is a "major theme" to the entire Hebrew Scriptures, that "the God of Israel is lord of creation."⁷⁹ If God is Lord of all, He can freely choose to work, and not to work.

⁷⁸ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 128.

⁷⁹ Henry Sturcke, *Encountering the Rest of God: How Jesus Came to Personify the Sabbath*, (TVZ, Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2005), 40.

How one decides what to do with the Sabbath is tightly linked to how one theologizes about the Sabbath. In a fascinating survey of the Church fathers, Beckwith and Stott point out how the patristics view the Sabbath in terms of three lines of thought. Firstly, they believe that it is strictly speaking, a Jewish institution.⁸⁰ From the writings of Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, they claim that the Sabbath though Jewish, points to something deeper.⁸¹ This means that one need not be too legalistic about the Sabbath. Secondly, from Clement of Alexandria, there is a physical benefit, where a weekly relaxation for both man and creature results in better productivity and rest.⁸² Thirdly, from Philo, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, there is also a spiritual benefit, in that the earthly Sabbath is a temporary institution.⁸³ Beckwith and Stott then claim that as far as Christians are concerned, this Saturday Sabbath has “come to an end.”⁸⁴ They give five theological justifications for this conclusion. Firstly, the Sabbath is but a “memorial of the old creation.”⁸⁵ Secondly, the old Sabbath is based on works.⁸⁶ Thirdly, if one keeps the Old Testament Sabbath legalistically, there is no freedom from the conscience of sin.⁸⁷ Fourthly, the old Sabbath is not able to point far enough to the

⁸⁰ Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday – A Biblical and Theological Study*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 52

⁸¹ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 54.

⁸² Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 54.

⁸³ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 54.

⁸⁴ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

⁸⁵ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

⁸⁶ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

⁸⁷ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

future that is to come.⁸⁸ Fifthly, one needs to be focused on Christ's fulfilment rather than a ritualistic keeping of the Law.⁸⁹

These point not to a transfer of Saturday to Sunday, but a Janus-like overview of the past and the future, to see God being revealed more and more. Looking back, one sees the importance of following the Law while God prepares to reveal Christ. Looking forward, one sees the importance to obey the whole Word of God, while God prepares to reveal the full coming of the Kingdom of God. It is helpful to learn of Mark Strauss's way of interpreting the Bible, called "Heart-of-God hermeneutic."⁹⁰ Such a method requires the cultivation of a "character" that reflects "God's nature" and "actions" that stem out of obedience to God. Using this method, Sabbath observance is thus not a matter of do's and don'ts but a question of how best one can demonstrate one's love for God, and to be dependent on God's grace. This interpretation explains the pattern of Sabbath observance in the early church through history. During the first century, during the time of Pliny where persecutions are common place, believers are careful to observe Sabbath only at night.⁹¹ In the second century, Sundays are important days for baptisms, for eucharists, and for Christians to gather together for worship and to encourage one another.⁹² The Early Church also adopts the need for discipline due to the acute problems in Acts, the Corinth Church, and the quarrels in some New

⁸⁸ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

⁸⁹ Beckwith, *The Christian Sunday*, 57.

⁹⁰ Mark Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 71.

⁹¹ Beckwith and Stott, *The Christian Sunday*, 89.

⁹² Beckwith and Stott, *The Christian Sunday*, 92-93.

Testament communities. Sunday gatherings are also days in which the church disciplines errant members.⁹³ The desire to come together, to worship God, and to discipline one another stems from a larger purpose of loving God and to obey God's Word. This attitude ought to be introduced into the way that modern Christians do Sunday worship.

Here, we are ready to move into a literature review of practices and implications for Sabbath living. As one celebrates the Sabbath wholly, one begins the workweek, wholly and holy. Cultivating a heart of restfulness in a restless world is far better than trying to contain a restless heart in even the most restful environments. When the heart is at peace, anywhere is home. When the heart is at Sabbath, something more than peace is achieved. The following chapter hopes to see how other literature invites one to see just that.

⁹³ Beckwith and Stott, *The Christian Sunday*, 102-103.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Survey of the Literature Available

The Sabbath is not a break from life but rather a profound theological lens that enables us to get a better look at all of it.

- Norman Wirzba

There are so many books written on the Sabbath that one can be tempted to be dismissive of every new book published. One way is to see such literature to function as pointers to the heavenly rest. There are many Biblical commentaries on the Torah and the Ten Commandments that dig up plenty of archaeological findings, exegesis of ancient texts, and development of theological themes and on Sabbath keeping. New Testament scholars regularly produce volumes that speak about the gospel passages surrounding Sabbath keeping, as well as commentaries on Hebrews about the Sabbath rest. There are also books written about the Sabbath that stem from a particular theological persuasion. Samuele Bacchiocchi writes about the need for the Sabbath from a Seventh-Day Adventist position. Richard Gaffin writes from a Reformed perspective, looking at how John Calvin perceives the Sabbath.¹ Some, like Christopher Ringwald compares the weekly day of rest from the perspectives of a Jew, a Muslim, and

¹ Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 1998).

a Roman Catholic.² Other writers like Stephen Miller offers the perspective from a non-religious angle, opting to call it a “Sunday” instead of the Sabbath per se.³ One of the best collections of Sabbath literature with regards to the Jewish and Christian traditions come from conferences that bring together scholars of many different backgrounds. Aware that many Christians are laypersons without the benefit of theological training, there are also authors that bring forth the practical perspectives of Sabbath keeping. These authors offer a solid backline with regards to the historical, the theological, and the ecumenical frameworks. “Frontline” authors such as Marva Dawn, Wayne Muller, Norman Wirzba, Donna Schaper, and Dan Allender are some of the writers who distill the basics of Sabbath keeping into more explicit practical terms. Others like Paul Jewett, Beckwith & Stott, Karen Burton Mains, and Willy Rordorf, choose to be more “Sunday” specific in their treatment of the rest day. Whether it is the Sabbath, the Sunday, the rest day or simply one day a week, they all generally agree that it is a unique part of both religious and secular lives. In *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, the key purpose is to inculcate breadth of understanding through conversation rather than conversion.⁴ It brings together some of the best writings on biblical, rabbinic, New Testament, Historical, Theological, Liturgical, Legal and Ecumenical perspectives. The meaning and purpose of Sabbath keeping and conversations is to remind ourselves that

² Christopher Ringwald, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims find faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ Stephen Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴ Eskenazi, Tamara C., Harrington, S.J., & Shea, William H., *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1991).

the Sabbath is made for men, and not men for the Sabbath. In the foreword, the general editor gives a helpful pointer with regards to studies surrounding Sabbath.

He writes: "It is written in the Zohar (Genesis 48a) that the Sabbath is a mirror of the world to come. May the image in that mirror become clearer as a result of the knowledge we obtain from this important work."⁵

This is also the posture in which this literature survey will adopt, that Sabbath keeping on a regular basis, will gradually evolve through a rhythmic practice in daily lives, culminating in a clearer view of the new world that is to come. From biblical scholarship to historical perspectives, from the theological backgrounds to the practical considerations, the literature will survey the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath through a movement of trust toward hope.

History of the Sabbath

Samuel A. Meier in his biblical survey of the Sabbath gives a fascinating journey through the seven days of creation in the form of "purification cycles."⁶ He claims that the seventh day is a rest day for God, and not for humans.⁷ Instead, the seventh day marks the beginning where creation bears the burden for work, in particular, through a journey of sanctification before God. Such a ritual prepares the nation of Israel through

⁵ Stanley Wagner, "Foreword" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), ix-x.

⁶ Samuel A. Meier, "The Sabbath and Purification Cycles" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 3-11.

⁷ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 6.

restoration unto holiness. Each time Israel practices the Sabbath, it is Israel being “resanctified before God.”⁸ Samuele Bacchiocchi goes much farther to divide Sabbath keeping into two aspects: a “moral (creational) and a ceremonial (Mosaic)” portion of the Sabbath command.⁹ He asserts that the reason why Sunday is deemed the necessary day of “observance” of the Sabbath is due mainly to the “Constantinian Sunday Law of 321.”¹⁰ His rationale for a strict observance is simply because we no longer live in a “perfect beginning” but in an “imperfect middle.”¹¹ He insists that Sunday is the new Sabbath for ceremonial reasons as well as political and historical reasons.¹² His observation supports Wagner’s exhortation to celebrate the Sabbath with an eye to a future perfect rest. Instead of insisting that the Sabbath be transferred from Saturday to Sunday, Craig Blomberg argues instead that the more important point is how the New Testament interprets the “Law and the Prophets.”¹³ He suggests that the “hermeneutical paradigm” be one that all of the Hebrew Scriptures can only be relevantly applied to the modern Christian after understanding it from the position of “fulfilled in Christ.”¹⁴ With this thought, Blomberg hints that the demise of Western Christianity is not because of a lack of Sabbath-keeping, but a delinquent emphasis on

⁸ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 10.

⁹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Remembering the Sabbath” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 69-97.

¹⁰ Bacchiocchi, *Remembering the Sabbath*, 86.

¹¹ Bacchiocchi, *Remembering the Sabbath*, 88.

¹² Bacchiocchi, *Remembering the Sabbath*, 87.

¹³ Craig Blomberg, “The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ: A response to S. Bacchiocchi and J. Primus.” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 122-128.

¹⁴ Blomberg, *The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ*, 126.

imitating Christ.¹⁵ If Christ has set us free, we shall be free indeed. Is it then not true that by insisting on Sabbath keeping religiously as a primary concern, Christ becomes a secondary after thought? True. Lest anyone throws away the baby with the bathwater, Dennis Kennedy reminds us about the importance of rituals like Sabbath keeping is to keep us sane from the madness of consumerism, activism, and non-stop workaholism.¹⁶

John Primus makes a remarkable point that history does not tell us more about the Sabbath, but the Sabbath sacrament is actually a “key to the end and purpose of history.”¹⁷ He draws on the historical perspectives of Calvin, Luther, and the Puritans that the Sabbath is not to be simply a “commandment for humanity but as a revelation of God.”¹⁸ Highlighting Luther’s emphasis on freedom from the law, Calvin’s abolishment of “outward keeping of the day” and the Puritans’ goal of treating the Sabbath as a “worship of God,” he sees the Sabbath highly as a “precious resource of life in a world of death.”¹⁹ Agreeing with Primus that the Sabbath is not to become an idol in itself, Kennedy suggests the approach adopted by Wendell Berry that instead of analyzing the Sabbath or arguing over the pros and cons of Sabbath-keeping, adopt a

¹⁵ Blomberg, *The Sabbath as Fulfilled in Christ*, 128.

¹⁶ Dennis Kennedy, “A Response to S. Bacchiocchi and J. Primus” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 129-136.

¹⁷ John Primus, “The Lord’s Day As Sabbath” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 98-121.

¹⁸ Primus, *The Lord’s Day as Sabbath*, 116.

¹⁹ Primus, *The Lord’s Day as Sabbath*, 120.

stance of admiration through poetry.²⁰ Let me summarise the three main positions. The first position (Bacchiochi) is the mandatory observance of a Saturday Sabbath. The second position (Primus and some Protestants) believes that Sunday is the “new” Sabbath day, though some call it the Lord’s Day.

The third position (Blomberg) is a qualified observance but from the centrality of the Cross of Christ. In other words, keeping the Sabbath is to be done from the perspective of following Christ as a primary concern. This is also the position of Hebrews 3-4 of a Sabbath rest in God through Christ. This author takes this stand. Yet, this seems to be the lesser of a more pressing concern: A non-observance of any day of rest at all! It will be argued that this is largely because of a lack of understanding of what Sabbath means.

Why Sabbath?

The Christian Sunday is currently being threatened, so says Kiesling. It is inundated by “moral danger,” “forms of recreation,” “hectic activism,” “disintegration of social life,” “secularization,” and most worryingly, a failure of successive generations to pass down the importance of the Sunday tradition.²¹ Calling for a recovery of the Sunday worship, “new meaning” is needed, such as “universality of the church,” “social

²⁰ Dennis Kennedy, “A Response to Bacchiochi and Primus” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J, and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 129-136.

²¹ Christopher Kiesling, *The Future of the Christian Sunday*, (New York, NY: Sheed & Ward, 1979), 4-15.

mission,” and “service” to the world.²² The fact remains, that even if one preserves the Sabbath, or the Christian Sunday as a form of keeping Sabbath, what then does one do about it? This brings many other related concerns.

What does Sabbath mean? Is it simply a day off from the office? Is it an antidote for personal restlessness? Is it just a ritual to be performed within a community? Is it mainly a rhythmic device for our daily living?

The Sabbath is firstly a key to identity. The Bible begins mentioning the Sabbath Day as being the Seventh Day as early as the creation narrative. The Sabbath thus begins as a way to remember God’s resting on the Seventh Day. At Sinai, the Ten Commandments were issued by Moses and then repeated in the second reading of the Law in Deuteronomy. The Sabbath is a key demonstration of how the Jews keep faith in God, and how the Jews kept their identity intact through Sabbath observance. For instance, Ringwald says that the biblical book of Chronicles connects the Sabbath to all other aspects of the Jewish race, namely, “covenant, land, rest, the temple, redemption, and restitution.”²³ The identity of being Jewish is bountifully preserved even when the Jews are ruled by hostile foreign powers. Despite being subdued by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Romans, and many of the cruel pagan regimes, the Jews continue to keep their Shabbat.

²² Kiesling, *The Future of the Christian Sunday*, 115.

²³ Christopher D. Ringwald, *A Day Apart*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47.

Preserving their identity is not the only purpose. The second point is that the Sabbath is also an expression of freedom and a key to joy. Ringwald notes that the Shabbat is more of a “happy salvation” rather than a stoic observance.²⁴ The spirit of Sabbath-keeping is essentially the freedom to observe the Shabbat, seeing it as a joyful act rather than a killjoy religious ritual. The key is being able to balance between “freedom and the law that preserves this freedom.”²⁵ Yet, many still associate Jewish Sabbath-keeping in terms of keeping the law, rather than the “freedom” of keeping the Law. On the other hand, there are also those who enjoy the keeping of the law. Flagsbrun tells of a zealous Shabbat observer who venerates the Seventh Day so much that he conveniently forgets the other six days.²⁶ Of course, the intent of the story is to show the depth of importance the Shabbat is to Jewish culture, rather than to downplay the other six days. Unfortunately, there are those who overplay this importance. One example is when Jesus clashes with the Pharisees over Sabbath keeping. In the gospels, there are several occasions where the practice of Sabbath, or the non-practice of it has generated controversies. Jesus is often in the middle of them. To this day, there are ongoing disputes about the place of Sabbath. From a liturgical perspective, John Baldovin argues for a specific day a week, namely Sunday as a day of worship and celebration, for the simple purpose of growing as a Body of Christ.²⁷ Lawrence A.

²⁴ Ringwald, *A Day Apart*, 48-49.

²⁵ Ringwald, *A Day Apart*, 49.

²⁶ Francine Flagsbrun, *The Fourth Commandment*, (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2002), x.

²⁷ John F. Baldovin, “Sabbath Liturgy: Celebrating Sunday as a Christian.” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 195-208.

Hoffman argues from a Jewish perspective that it is not the meaning that justifies the keeping of the Sabbath, but the Sabbath that is the key to understanding meaning.²⁸

William H Shea takes issue with both Baldovin and Hoffman. He argues that Baldovin's insistence on a day of worship curiously misses out the nature of Sabbath keeping during the Early Church era, where Christians have been regularly persecuted. At the same time, he indicates that there is an "evolution" with regards to Church liturgy, which suggests that Sabbath keeping is also evolving over time.²⁹ Frederick E.

Greenspahn makes an observation that the lack of Sabbath keeping has less to do with agreements or disagreements with the Sabbath per se, but a "symptom" of a deeper cultural problem, namely, modernity.³⁰ One of the results seems to be the creation of a "double Sabbath (Saturday and Sunday)" of sports, entertainment, and leisure.³¹

Agreeing with Greenspahn, Craig Harline studies the evolution of Sunday from

"Babylonia to the Super Bowl" saying that the nature of Sunday is constantly changing.³²

Stephen Miller shares similar sentiments insisting that the modern Sunday is

²⁸ Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Upholding the Sabbath Day: The Jewish Sabbath Faces Modernity" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 209-229.

²⁹ William H. Shea, "A Response to L. Hoffman and J. Baldovin" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 230-235.

³⁰ Frederick E. Greenspahn, "A Response to L. Hoffman and J. Baldovin" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 236-241.

³¹ Greenspahn, *A Response*, 236-241.

³² Craig Harline, *Sunday – A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2007), 381.

increasingly an important day for work because of “globalization.”³³ Like Kennedy, he too quotes Wendell Berry, saying that the Sabbath is necessary to “keep order in our soul.”³⁴ Thus, the necessary partner in seeing the key to joyful celebration of the Sabbath day is freedom. In the light of Jesus’ words about the Sabbath made for man, it is reasonable to proceed on the basis of the Sabbath being useful for modern living. The third thing to note is that the Sabbath is not just for Jews or Christians. It is for all mankind.

If the Sabbath is for all mankind, perhaps it is good to revisit the differences of the various understandings to see if some common points of agreement can be found. The place of the Sabbath is not just a Jewish concern. Christians are also locked in their own controversy. The main disputes surround the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath? Is the Sabbath of the Old Testament still applicable in New Testament times? Is the Sabbath still binding for today? While most Jewish quarters still hang on to the practice and reverence of the Sabbath day, Christians are less united in their understanding of the place of the Sabbath. The fact that scholars and theologians continue to maintain a level of conversation about the Sabbath speaks about the common bond of humanity.

Another commonness is the acceptance of differences in perspectives. The understanding of the Sabbath has undergone many interpretations. The Adventists

³³ Stephen Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 269.

³⁴ Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays*, 271.

continues to adhere to Saturday as the Sabbath Day. Bacchiocchi, a renowned Sabbatarian, argues for Saturday by saying that Sunday is not necessary as Paul has not abandoned the Sabbath, or in no way repudiated the place of the Jewish Sabbath.³⁵ Luther disagrees, preferring to adopt a freedom perspective, that “every day should be a Sabbath for us Christians.”³⁶ Despite the differences regarding the precise literal day, there are great similarities about setting one day aside to do something different from the other days. Hickman calls simply for one day to be set aside for rest.³⁷ Several modern writers prefer not to dwell on the literal days, but opt for a spiritual representation instead. Wirzba advocates a *rhythm* to allow one to “participate regularly” in a day of delight.³⁸ Schaper calls Sabbath keeping as a “conscious choice to restrict input.”³⁹ Allender describes Sabbath keeping as a holy “moment” to be a day of delight.⁴⁰ A group of scholars posit three purposes of Sabbath keeping. Firstly it is toward a “relational presence,” where Sabbath time is a time for a way to connect with God, people, and self.⁴¹ Secondly, keeping Sabbath is for “spiritual coherence” where worship takes center stage on a day for the Lord.⁴² Thirdly, there is a social benefit that points others toward an “alternative future,” distinguish believers from the world, and

³⁵ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1977), 367.

³⁶ Martin Luther, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, (St Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1331.

³⁷ Martha Whitmore Hickman, *A Day of Rest*, (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1999), 1-7.

³⁸ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 15.

³⁹ Schaper, Donna, *Sabbath Keeping*, (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999), xii.

⁴⁰ Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas-Nelson, 2009), 3.

⁴¹ Edward O'Flaherty, Rodney L. Petersen and Timothy A. Norton, eds., *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 1.

⁴² O'Flaherty, et al, *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, 41.

to be active in global social concerns.⁴³ All of these speak about the diversity of viewpoints that enhance rather than divide the human race. This common diligence to seek truth is a wonderful expression of continued learning from one another. It is true humanity.

The fourth point is about learning and growing toward God. Sabbath keeping is not simply an earthly bounded activity. It points toward a destination that is not of this world. As far as learning is concerned, one helpful way to see the Sabbath is to adopt Clement of Alexandria's advice that one sees the Mosaic Law as a fountain to grow our knowledge of God. He writes,

But it is clear to every one that piety, which teaches to worship and honour is the highest and oldest case; and the law itself exhibits justice, and teaches wisdom, by abstinence from sensible images, and by inviting to the Maker and Father of the Universe, and from this sentiment, as from a fountain, all intelligence increases.⁴⁴

Like Paul addressing Gentiles, Clement speaks toward a largely non-Jewish audience, frequently addressing the "why" question of keeping the Mosaic Law. In contrast to the knowledge and growth paradigm, Jewish writers typically assume the necessity of the Law. It is what makes them "Jewish." The Jewish scholar, Harnack extends the relevance of the Sabbath not just for Jews, but also for "modern man."⁴⁵ In

⁴³ O'Flaherty, et al, *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, 119-120.

⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. Rev. William Wilson, Vol II, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), 47.

⁴⁵ Nathan A. Barack, *A History of the Sabbath*, New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1965), xv.

other words, all humanity can benefit from the Sabbath. All are invited to pursue the heavenly goals. Another Jew, Millgram points out the Sabbath as the “most important” of all Jewish festivals.⁴⁶ Attitudes like that makes it a problem for Christians from a Jewish background. It creates the problem of an identity crisis, especially when they observe both the Sabbath and the Lord’s Sunday with the same level of importance. Concerned that the Gentile Christians will be drawn into the disputes, Paul has to remind Gentile Christians that freedom in Christ trumps legalism. Thus, he tells them that there is “*no obligation to observe the Sabbath.*”⁴⁷ Needless to say, Adventists believe otherwise.⁴⁸ Finding a balance in the midst of such strong convictions is to say the least, challenging. Through understanding, one need not find differences of opinions divisive. One way to understand the different interpretations is to see the contexts of each of the synoptic gospel writer. Luke highlights “freedom,” Matthew lists high “regard” for the Sabbath, while Mark suggests Jesus’ disciples are expected to keep the Sabbath, regardless.⁴⁹ Still, the separation of Sabbath from Sunday remains a hot potato. There is also the difference in terms of contexts. With understanding comes intelligible practice. In the first century, Tertullian is known to have understood the clash of Jewish and Gentile cultures, and thus “*refrains from bowing the knee*” on the Jewish Sabbath.⁵⁰ While many through the first century remains fixated on the choice of which

⁴⁶ Abraham E. Millgram, *Sabbath: The Day of Delight*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1944), 1.

⁴⁷ Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 43.

⁴⁸ Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, 45.

⁴⁹ Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, 45.

⁵⁰ Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, 47.

day to keep the Sabbath, the early Church Fathers start to talk about an “eighth day.”⁵¹

This lifts one away from the horizontal controversies between sects or religious controversies to recognize the vertical dimension of our relationship with God. The Cappadocian Fathers, like Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Basil, even write a homily depicting a metaphorical eighth day for believers.⁵² They add: “Now ‘one’ and ‘eight’ are the same, in itself distinctly indicating that really ‘one’ and ‘eight’ of which the Psalmist makes mention in certain titles of the Psalms, the state which follows after this present time, the day which knows no waning or eventide, and no successor, that age which ends not or grows old.”⁵³

Perhaps, it is simply a fascination with numerology. The point is that the Sabbath is really different from the rest of the days, and more so because the Fathers are more interested in pointing hope toward the Resurrection. Thus for them, the Day is to be complete with “prayer and contemplation.”⁵⁴ Jewett notes that the use of the Eighth Day has largely disappeared due to the “complexity of the symbolism.”⁵⁵ Thus, while one can try to avoid the horizontal controversies among people and point toward the vertical dimension between God and men, eventually, one falls back down to earth to grapple with the earthly implications of Sabbath keeping. In other words, sooner or later, practical considerations will still come up somewhere. One such example is in how politics influence religious matters.

⁵¹ Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, 49.

⁵² Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, 43.

⁵³ Basil the Great, in “On the Holy Spirit”, *Sources Chretennes* 17bis.484.

⁵⁴ Gregory the Great, *Patrologia Latina*, 77.1255.

⁵⁵ Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, 51

When Constantine becomes Christian, religious disputes are silenced with political legislation. This is one reason why Sunday is still considered “pagan” in many circles.⁵⁶ The Jewish-Gentile disputes during the first century turns into a Saturday-Sunday controversy in the third and fourth centuries. Safe to say, scholars will continue to visit and re-visit both the horizontal and the vertical considerations that it is best to embrace both in our understanding of Sabbath. Yang gives a clue to why the disputes are ongoing. He says that those trying to pin down a day, based on Jesus’ actions in Matthew’s gospel, are essentially “examples of poor contextualization of biblical texts into a particular context.”⁵⁷ This is entirely possible, and important if one is to point believers not to the observance of the Day per se, but to the Person that the day is meant to cultivate one’s attention toward. This is one reason why this project will not be too concerned about the arduous details of the Saturday-Sunday divide. Clowney’s eschatological perspective of the Decalogue is helpfully suggested in the title of his book.⁵⁸ The contexts change, but the law does not change. The spirit of the Law does not change, though the working out of the law is worked out at different levels.

The idea of a Sabbath day made not just for Jews and Christians is evident in other religions as well. For instance, the monotheistic religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity all share this common practice of setting one day aside for rest and worship. Muslims have their *Juma* on Fridays. Jews celebrate their *Shabbat* on Saturdays, and

⁵⁶ Jewett, *The Lord’s Day*, 47.

⁵⁷ Yang, Yong-Eui, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew’s Gospel*, (Sheffield, England, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 297.

⁵⁸ Edmund P. Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007).

Christians proclaim Sundays as the *Lord's Day*. Although the religions are different, the principle is the same. A day is set apart that is different from the rest.

Another example is in how a common day can be seen with different perspectives. Which day is more sacred? Perhaps, that is NOT the right question. This is because mortal man cannot pretend to be able to deal with tools that are metaphysical, beyond his normal realm of understanding. The aptitude for learning has to be managed together with an attitude of humility toward the Spirit of God, that we can only learn what God teaches or allows us to learn. Augustine further explores this point.

While many consider one day relatively more sacred than the rest of the days, Augustine cautions one against equating the Seventh Day with the way God see perfection. He argues for a very unique way to see the Sabbath. Instead of the Jewish common understanding of 7 as the perfect number that the people have come to know, Augustine suggests that the number 6 is in fact "perfect."⁵⁹ What is perfect for God on the Seventh Day is incomprehensible for man, and 6 then is the most perfect that man can ever understand. In this context, the Sabbath Day, or the Seventh Day when God rested from all his works, cannot be understood in any materialistic way. In order to understand God's resting on the Seventh Day, Augustine advocates two pre-conditions. Firstly, one needs to purge the mind of "right or lawful" questions.⁶⁰ Secondly, one must avoid projecting the hard work and laborious toil of lowly man, and not

⁵⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *On Genesis: The Works of Augustine*, trans. Edmund Hill, (New York, NY: New City Press, 2002), 249.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Genesis*, 250.

superimpose that onto our High God.⁶¹ In other words, Augustine is arguing that God's rest is not the same as man's rest. He gives a clue, that what is time for "rest" to God is time to "worship" for us.⁶² This brings to mind Samuel Meier's paper about the Seventh Day of creation is God's perfect rest rather than man's leisurely rest.⁶³ While man needs God, the converse is not true. God does not need man in the same manner that man needs God. God is by Himself Self-Sufficient, and Self-Sustaining. There is no need for God to "increase his blessedness and bliss."⁶⁴ In this light, Augustine criticizes the Jews for their manner of Sabbath observance being too "literal-minded, materialistic a way."⁶⁵ He says that when one finds fault with people working on the Sabbath, they are like finding fault with Jesus, and in that sense, Augustine advocates that the literal day of Sabbath observance "has been eliminated."⁶⁶ Thus, Augustine is coming from a point of "newness of life" in Christ, rather than a rigid legalistic preservation of 1 day.⁶⁷ In contrast, he proposes that "good works" is key to seeing "God's rest."⁶⁸ Those who do so do, without boasting experiences a "perpetual Sabbath."⁶⁹ Again, there is this curious similar day, yet different perspectives of that same day. Appreciating when to apply either the horizontal or the vertical perspectives of the Sabbath is an integral part of

⁶¹ Augustine, *Genesis*, 250.

⁶² Augustine, *Genesis*, 250.

⁶³ Samuel A. Meier, "The Sabbath and Purification Cycles" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 3-11.

⁶⁴ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 275.

⁶⁵ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 255.

⁶⁶ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 255.

⁶⁷ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 255.

⁶⁸ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 254.

⁶⁹ Meier, *The Sabbath and Purification Cycles*, 255.

learning and growing as a human being toward God. Diversity and openness in a market of ideas and opinions give us a great opportunity to learn not just about God but also about our human selves.

How then can this diversity of opinions be maintained without necessarily dividing it farther apart? One important factor is freedom, which is the fifth point.

Late Medieval theologians suggest similar practices of good works on the Sabbath Day. Claudius of Turin distinguishes between “good works” and the “letter” of the law, saying that Jesus has granted “freedom” for all who believe, and observing the Sabbath is not simply about NOT doing anything, but that doing good works flows out of this freedom.⁷⁰ Theodulph of Orleans argues differently, saying that on the Lord’s Day, besides religious rituals like prayer, lighting of candles, and Solemn Mass, or daily necessities, “nothing else should be done.”⁷¹ It is reasonable to interpret this as a freedom not to let workaholism or activism take over a sacred space. Of course, Theodulph is writing to priests specifically, but there is no reason why such practices cannot be extended to the rest of the people too. There is a freedom to do good works. Theodulph makes a special plea for all to extend “hospitality” to the needy especially on that day, “hospitality without grumbling.”⁷² Some try to bridge the Similar-Yet-

⁷⁰ Claudius of Turin, “Commentary on Galatians” in *Early Medieval Theology*, ed. George E. McCracken, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 229.

⁷¹ Theodulph of Orleans, “Precepts to Priests,” in *Early Medieval Theology*, ed. George E. McCracken, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 390.

⁷² Theodulph of Orleans, *Precepts to Priests*, 390.

Different paradigm by trying to close the gap, that it is all about God. One example is how the Patristics treat the day of rest.

Freedom has been manifested in different cultural contexts. The Church Fathers, as observed by Patristic scholars note a progression of Sabbath keeping from a day of rest to a day of “worship and rest.”⁷³ Literal interpreters tend to move the Jewish Saturday to a Christian Sunday.⁷⁴ Some like Irenaeus prefer a practical approach, using the Sabbath controversies as teaching moments to distinguish the Law from the Spirit.⁷⁵ For him, the way to meaningfully keep the Sabbath is to turn any works that make the soul “weary” in two ways: “observe the Sabbath” and “rest for the Lord God.”⁷⁶ This is because the “perfect rest” is not found in the six days but something beyond. Such keeping of a day of rest, inculcates in man the freedom to explore other things not normally explored during the other six days. This something beyond is what believers need to strive to enter. Thus, the Fathers suggest spiritual practices like whole “contemplation,” meditation on Scriptures day and night, celebrating Sabbath rituals, and resting in the “rest which pleases God.”⁷⁷ In order to do so, one needs to be able to pace with “leisure.”⁷⁸ The essence of keeping the Sabbath appears to be making space for God, by changing one’s tempo of the heart. According to the *Patrologia Latina*, Sabbath practice has to do more with the heart rather than the hands. This is perfectly

⁷³ Thomas L. Carroll and Thomas Halton, *Liturgical Practices in the Fathers*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 18.

⁷⁴ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices*., 19.

⁷⁵ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices*., 67.

⁷⁶ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices*., 71.

⁷⁷ Carroll et al, *Liturgical Practices*., 72.

⁷⁸ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices*., 73.

logical. One can go through the motions in keeping the Sabbath, and yet the heart remains restless. This is particularly relevant to those who are “disturbed in heart and conscience” even in their Sabbath practice.⁷⁹ Recognizing a need to balance one’s individual pursuit of Sabbath-keeping, and the community one is in, Ambrose advises that one follows the custom of the church one is in.⁸⁰ In other words, follow the practices of the community one is in, as a default Sabbath keeping initiative.

To recap, there is a similar-yet-different paradigm with regards to the Sabbath observance. One way to healthily distil the differences and yet learn together is via dialogue, seen from the example of Novak and Schuster. For Novak, it is simply because both read the same Torah. Citing the great Jewish theologian, Moses Maimonides, Novak suggests that in the keeping of the Sabbath, anyone can discover a “sabbath on their own.”⁸¹ They can self-discover God’s purposes for them, on purpose of creation, on being “inspired to imitate” God’s rest, and toward worshiping God.⁸² For Jews, the practice of the Sabbath extends “peace” to anyone, even their enemies.⁸³ Novak then adds an interesting take while the Sabbath is universally for everyone, only “Judaism has a greater grasp” of natural law than others.⁸⁴ It is not about man finding God during the Sabbath, but God finding man.⁸⁵ Yet, in a surprising twist, Novak insists that Jewish-

⁷⁹ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices.*, 73.

⁸⁰ Carroll, et al, *Liturgical Practices.*, 76.

⁸¹ Michael Novak, “The Sabbath Day,” in *The Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 73.

⁸² Novak, *The Sabbath Day*, 73.

⁸³ Novak, *The Sabbath Day*, 73.

⁸⁴ Novak, *The Sabbath Day*, 74.

⁸⁵ Novak, *The Sabbath Day*, 76.

Christian dialogues agree mainly on “theoretical matters” but should not be expected to lead easily to practical results.⁸⁶ Schuster admits that Sabbath keeping is synonymous with Jewish identity.⁸⁷ At the same time, she confesses that Christians have not been in agreement themselves with regards to the Jewish Sabbath. While the early Church Fathers and Reformers distinguish the Sabbath Saturday from the Christian Sunday, the Puritans try to provide a “complete continuity” between the two special days.⁸⁸ The freedom from being locked into any one view frees us to seek God even more to learn about the Sabbath rest. This is a delicate balance between observing the ritual religiously and being free to enjoy God intentionally on any special day. This balancing act can free one toward observing some very practical steps.

Turning away from Novak’s apparently more philosophical and theological stance, Shuster provides four practical steps to observe the Sabbath, which she entitles, “Common Affirmations.”⁸⁹ Firstly, she points out that the Sabbath observance enables one to be humble, to take a day to know that “everything depends” on God.⁹⁰ While many count the costs of stopping from work, she points out that there is also a cost of “not stopping.”⁹¹ Secondly, on “justice,” when one rests, one allows others to rest too.⁹² Thirdly, she says both Jews and Christians share a common “hope” as both observe the

⁸⁶ Novak, *The Sabbath Day*, 79.

⁸⁷ Marguerite Shuster, “Response to Sabbath Day,” in the *Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others*, ed. Roger E. Van. Harn, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 80.

⁸⁸ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 81.

⁸⁹ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 83.

⁹⁰ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 83.

⁹¹ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 83.

⁹² Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 84.

Sabbath.⁹³ Finally, she notes that “refreshment” while it has become a “cottage industry” for a frenetic modern society, it is still valid because “God cares for our well-being.”⁹⁴ With regards to these four points, Shuster advises, “Careful attention to the fourth commandment would rightly reshape the whole of our lives, teaching us to live the rest of the week in the light of the one day that is different from all the others, the one day that tells us that the other days are, in the end, not for naught.”⁹⁵

This brief exchange between Novak and Shuster is just one example of how when one is free to learn from both Jews and Christians, they gain a wider perspective. It also tells us that various levels of bigotry exist in all camps. When we understand why they do what they are doing, we are prone to understand them better. That is so true according to Rupert Davis. What the Jews insist on their Saturday Sabbath, the Reformers in England and Scotland impose “strict rules” on their congregations.⁹⁶ This is quite similar with regards to legalism, but different in terms of contexts. During the time of the Protestant Reformation, the “strict rules” were passed to “check widespread abuses.”⁹⁷ Though the laws have now become more liberal, except in rural Scotland, David notes that the abuses are apparently coming back where “people break the Sabbath with a clear conscience!”⁹⁸ Davis, after lamenting on the cycle of history repeating itself, he suggests four things that Christians should do. These are worshiping,

⁹³ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 84.

⁹⁴ Shuster, *Response to Sabbath Day*, 84-85.

⁹⁵ Shuster, *Response to the Sabbath Day*, 85.

⁹⁶ Rupert E. Davis, *Making Sense of the Commandments*, (Westminster, London: Epworth Press, 1990), 56.

⁹⁷ Davis, *Making Sense of the Commandments*, 56.

⁹⁸ Davis, *Making Sense of the Commandments*, 58.

teaching (or being taught), relaxing in creative activities, enjoying time with family, and even sleeping!⁹⁹

The sixth point is a dangerously individualistic perspective of Sabbath-keeping: Keeping Sabbath for self-gratification instead of glorifying God. Putting it in positive terms, Sabbath keeping will not lock us into self. It points us both outward and inward. In our modern world, the concern for one's well-being have become treacherously individualistic. The Sabbath is increasingly being seen as another utilitarian device to combat one's busy life. Richard Lowery sees no difference in the hearts of people, both ancient and modern. Like the ancient forefathers, our yearning for rest is more acute due to "our own stressed-out, overworked, spiritually starving world."¹⁰⁰ Brian Brock says it aptly about the challenges of a technological society where he observes that, "The deepest challenge of Christian faith in a technological age is its questioning of modern certainties about the relation of knowledge to belief and activity."¹⁰¹

While faith requires one to learn to trust God for all things, modernism persuades us that science and technology are tools for us to question everything! Restlessness is a mark of human fall, and technology has only accelerated the madness of a rushed world. One way to resist the worldliness of non-stop action is to learn to observe a wholesome life, learning to take a day a week to cease, to rest, to embrace,

⁹⁹ Davis, *Making Sense of the Commandments*, 59-60.

¹⁰⁰ Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, (St Louis, MS: Chalice Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁰¹ Brian Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 4.

and to feast.¹⁰² Instead of observing the Sabbath in order to take a break, Dawn farther suggests in a follow up book that Sabbath “reclaims,” “revitalizes,” and “renews” the Christian’s call to serve.¹⁰³ This brings in an idea that keeping the Sabbath need not to be unidirectional in benefits. One can refrain from work and to observe Sabbath in order to rest. At the same time, Sabbath can enable us to rest well so that we can work well. This is because the Sabbath is a gift that enables us to give freely, joyfully and lovingly.¹⁰⁴ It is a gift that not only gives, but enables one to give. This is important for ministers, pastors, and all those engaged in Christian service. Thomas Swears points out how the approaching Sabbath each week is an opportunity for an intentional time toward spiritual formation and to grow as a person. When a person is growing well, he is then able to “say no well” and to say “yes faithfully.”¹⁰⁵ This highlights again that the keeping of the Sabbath benefits both oneself and others.

Apart from people in ministry, it is also possible for laypersons to celebrate and benefit from Sabbath keeping. It is a call to all Christians to be counter-cultural. Norman Wirzba in advocating for Sabbath rhythms, argues that the benefit is not simply withdrawing from a world of madness to an oasis of restfulness, but also to be reminded of the “inherent sanctity of the world,” the very world that Christ died for.¹⁰⁶ It helps us not only to see the world as real as possible but to see the world as God sees it.

¹⁰² Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), xi.

¹⁰³ Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 91.

¹⁰⁴ Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas R. Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath – Spiritual Disciplines for Pastors*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 16.

¹⁰⁶ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath – Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 12.

Brueggemann calls it the “sabbath voice.”¹⁰⁷ Allender calls it a holy “moment.”¹⁰⁸ Wayne Muller advocates a return to a rhythm of rest and work that addresses the “violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments.”¹⁰⁹ Perhaps, Sabbath time is another way of affirming the writer of Ecclesiastes that there is a time for everything.¹¹⁰

Put it another way, when we are too sucked in by the world, we will see the world in worldly terms. Only when we rest in Christ, we learn to see the world redeemed in Christ. Christine Sine sees an opportunity here to live with “shalom rhythm” in a world that loves to party itself away, non-stop.¹¹¹

Beyond Mere Earthly Rest

Suppose there is one day where everyone can agree to adopt as their Sabbath, the people entering it will be entering it with all kinds of different inner packages. The external act of Sabbath keeping can easily hide any spiritual or emotional condition. Restlessness after all is an invisible condition manifested in outward actions. While all are infected with restlessness, some are more restless than others. Peterson bemoans the condition of cultures that are supposed to be free, saying that the “realities of

¹⁰⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 294.

¹⁰⁸ Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas-Nelson, 2009), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath- Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1999), 6.

¹¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 3.

¹¹¹ Christine Sine, *Sacred Rhythms*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 165.

freedom” are not actually lived out.¹¹² This is because people have opted to make themselves the focus of attention instead of God.¹¹³ Likewise, it is entirely probable that people do not rest well on any designated sacred day is because their attention is not on God in the first place! Mark Buchanan offers a great insight that tells us that entering God’s rest is not to be done on our own strength. Instead, he says that although liturgy is done by people, it is not about people.¹¹⁴ It is about God. For Buchanan, Sabbath is more about the “heart,” “attitude,” a “perspective.”¹¹⁵ Dorothy Bass teaches us to see Sabbath as opportunity to receive time as a “gift of God.”¹¹⁶

Biblically, such restlessness is a symptom of the Mark of Cain. After the world’s first murder, Cain obtains the dubious distinction of being the first person to be cursed with a restless streak.¹¹⁷ This mark of Cain remains an indelible smudge of sin. This has tainted the entire human race with a dire need for redemption toward true rest. In our modern 24x7 technological society, online devices tempt us to work so hard, that we often find it difficult to go offline. Addictions and problems related to overwork are common. It is getting very hard to withdraw from the daily activities to a state of doing nothing. Barbara Killinger, a clinical psychologist, highlights the subtleness of workaholics, by calling them a “respectable addiction.”¹¹⁸ Many pastors have

¹¹² Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light: Reflections on the Free Life*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1982), 10.

¹¹³ Peterson, *Traveling Light*, 10.

¹¹⁴ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006), 9.

¹¹⁵ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 77.

¹¹⁷ Genesis 4:12.

¹¹⁸ Barbara Killinger, *Workaholics*, (New York, NY: Firefly, 1991), 3.

experienced burnout as they try to meet unending expectations of their congregations. By tying their self-esteem to their performance, they allow activities to dominate self-identity. Sabbath may become another temptation for them to “perform.” The question is how can a restless clergyman help a congregation be restful?

Many books have been written to combat this restlessness pandemic. The title of the book written by the renowned Adventist Scholar, Dr Samuele Bacchiocchi, aptly describes both the human condition and the human need.¹¹⁹ In “*Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*,” Bacchiocchi points out that faithful observance of the Sabbath leads one toward the sevenfold promise of rest.¹²⁰ This enables the Sabbath keeper to move from restlessness in the world, to a state of restfulness in the Divine Creator God. Based on his reading of Matthew 11:28, true rest lies not in “pills” or “places” but in a divine “Person.”¹²¹ He comprehensively describes this divinely inspired rest in terms of “Creation,” “Divine Presence,” “Competition,” “Belonging,” “Social Tensions,” “Redemption,” and “Service.”¹²² Like Bacchiocchi, other scholars share this same idea of respite from the world a day a week, in order to achieve restfulness. The theologian, Marva Dawn, writes not one but two books about the Sabbath. She prescribes four ways to escape from the restlessness of the world, through ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting.¹²³ Yet, the book focuses largely on the existential side of keeping the Sabbath,

¹¹⁹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1980).

¹²⁰ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 238-244.

¹²¹ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 236.

¹²² Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 238-244.

¹²³ Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

to help readers to recognize “the effects of our ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting.”¹²⁴ It is a brilliant distillation of Bacchiocchi’s seven-fold aspect, which I believe Bacchiocchi is more inclined toward equating the Sabbath with a perfect number “7.” Both are quite spot on in persuading people to move from restlessness to restfulness. Dawn’s second book extends the four aspects of cease-rest-embrace-feast further, moving from the Sabbath as a religious day to observe, toward embracing the Sabbath as a gift; and a call to make it a way of life for people who serve God in Church and the world.¹²⁵ If *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* is predominantly local for self-preservation or nourishment, *The Sense of the Call* is global, for service of God and the world, through a Sabbatical way of life. It leads us to a higher agenda, the kingdom of God: “God’s Kingdom reclaims us, revitalizes us, and renews us and thus reigns through us before others, on behalf of others, sometimes in spite of others, and always with others.”¹²⁶

Ideally, we can see how Sabbath as rest, moving from restlessness (Stage 1) to restfulness (Stage 2), from restfulness to anticipating the coming of God’s kingdom (Stage 3). Indeed, if we can rest in such a way as to be captivated by God’s kingdom that we should all practice the Sabbath religiously! Unfortunately, despite such a promise, Sabbath as a way of life is often stuck at Stage 0, that is, promoted but not even practiced! The thought of using the Sabbath as a means to fight restlessness sounds perfect for a world of busyness and hurried lifestyles. Yet, we must ask why is

¹²⁴ Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, xi.

¹²⁵ Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹²⁶ Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 278.

this idea of Sabbath often “remains as a dessert most people left on the table?”¹²⁷

Bacchiocchi and Dawn assume a kind of spiritual *willingness* to practice the Sabbath in the first place. Even though their books are written for a community, their teachings predominantly adopt a one-to-many manner of teaching about the Sabbath. This classroom approach is quite typical of many modern Western evangelical approaches to the Sabbath, the chief form being the preacher to congregation each Sunday. In the West, there are too many individual initiatives and too few community-based ones, which is the observation of Bellah and others in his landmark book.¹²⁸ We need to practice the Sabbath as a community. How about seeing the Sabbath as a neighbourly event. Learning about the Sabbath needs to be done both inside AND outside the classroom, both personally and communal. Here is the first problem. With the rich Sabbath materials available, what happens if one does not feel like practicing it? What if a person is unconvinced that the Sabbath is to be practiced? Who is a person accountable to, for practicing or not practicing the Sabbath? Sabbath as Rest often starts at an individual level before moving to group level. For example, Barbara Brown Taylor’s memoir of her Sabbath as a form of saying “no” is motivated more by self rather than group.¹²⁹ In contrast, Sabbath as a group *ritual* reverses this approach, and moves from a community practice that results in individual enrichment. In summary, we cannot depend on Sabbath keeping based on personal disciplines. Sabbath keeping can be enriched within the context of a community. Lauren F Winner, a former Jew-turned-

¹²⁷ Christopher Ringwald, *A Day Apart*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), xi.

¹²⁸ Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart*, (University of California, 1996).

¹²⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar to the World*, (HarperOne, 2009), 121-140.

Christian, likens Sabbath keeping as to lighting a candle. She tells about how lighting candles on Sabbath days shed light on what it means to live as a community. She tells the story of a Rabbi Jose who lights a candle so that it brings light to other people who are in the dark.¹³⁰ This is a nice image to see not only of how our Sabbath keeping pleases God's in terms of fulfilling the law, but such a practice leads others to a deeper knowledge of God in Christ. Herold Weiss reflects on Sabbath keeping among Jews and Christians and suggests that instead of understanding the Sabbath from Jewish and Christian perspectives, the Sabbath can be used to understand Jewish-Christian relations!¹³¹ How is that for community building!

This is also the stand of Paul Jewett who argues that observing one day a week, namely the Lord's Day of rest, we can spring beyond the Jewish identity mark of keeping Sabbath, to a Christ-fulfilled mark of entering into God's heavenly rest.¹³² Roger Beckwith and Wilfred Stott describe this act of entering through four ideals. First, each observance of the Lord's Day brings about a reminder of Jesus' resurrection.¹³³ Second, corporate worship entails the coming together before God.¹³⁴ Third, the sanctification of the day keeps one reverent before God.¹³⁵ Four, one is free to practice the "law of

¹³⁰ Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), 115.

¹³¹ Herold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness – The Sabbath among Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 182.

¹³² Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day – A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship*, (Grand Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 1971), 164.

¹³³ Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday – A Biblical and Historical Study*, (Grand Rapids, MA: Baker Book House, 1978), 143.

¹³⁴ Beckwith, et al, *The Christian Sunday*, 143.

¹³⁵ Beckwith, et al, *The Christian Sunday*, 143.

love.”¹³⁶ All of these actions prepare one’s mind, heart, and will toward entering God’s rest. Willy Rordorf homes in on this by saying that the “Sunday rest” can be seen as an “anticipation of the eternal rest at the end of time.”¹³⁷ Heschel paints a beautiful picture of the Sabbath keeping with regards to it being useful to “conquer space and sanctify time.”¹³⁸

Spiritual Rest

John Calvin in his commentary of “spiritual rest” in Hebrews sees a form of “perpetual Sabbath” called “sabbathizing” that is reserved for God’s people. Such a rest is seen in terms of a “union with God.”¹³⁹ The principle idea of resting is to “mortify our flesh,” give reverence to God via holiness, and as we abstain from work, we allow God to work through us.¹⁴⁰ Calvin balances the rituals of Sabbath rest by understanding it in the light of grace. By focusing on the heavenly rest, the Sabbath ritual is not restricted to a weekly ritual of abstention from work, but a renewal of hope in the coming future rest in God, which is far greater.¹⁴¹ Thus, Calvin is less convicted about a religious keeping of Sabbath being one day a week, and more convicted about imitating Christ all times. Sabbath rest is a reminder of that call to imitate Christ. Richard Gaffin on his evaluation of John Calvin’s ideas surrounding the Sabbath notes that Calvin and the early

¹³⁶ Beckwith, et al, *The Christian Sunday*, 144.

¹³⁷ Willy Rordorf, *Sunday – The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, (London, GB: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 299.

¹³⁸ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (New York, NY: FSG, 1951), 101.

¹³⁹ John Owen, trans., *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews / by John Calvin*, (Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1853), 98.

¹⁴⁰ Owen, *Commentaries*, 98.

¹⁴¹ Owen, *Commentaries*, 99.

Reformers are less concerned about Sabbath as a “dominating concern,” but more focused on gospel rather than law.¹⁴² Commenting on the biggest problem with Calvin’s perspective on the Sabbath, Gaffin notes that the main weakness in Calvin’s theology is the negative tone with regards to making sin as “an integral element” in the creation ordinance.¹⁴³ However, he agrees with Calvin with regards to the spiritual rest:

He was to toil, but that toil would result in rest. A weekly day of rest was instituted to remind him of the purposefulness of his work; it also provided rhythmic refreshment of body and soul (periodic psycho-physical rest, in other words), appropriate to him in the integrity of his psychical nature. The weekly Sabbath was a continual reminder to Adam that history is not a ceaseless repetition of days. Rather, at the beginning of each week he could look forward to the rest of the seventh day. That weekly cycle impressed on him that he, together with the created order as a whole, was moving toward a goal, a nothing less than eschatological culmination.¹⁴⁴

Of the Sabbath rest, James Thompson agrees that even as early as the days of the Israelites in the wilderness, Sabbath observance points to a “promised rest” in the future.¹⁴⁵ Bruce describes Sabbath keeping as “participation” with God’s resting.¹⁴⁶ Such a rest can be easily “forfeited” through “disobedience” or the hardening of hearts.¹⁴⁷ In order to enter this rest, one needs to be obedient. One needs to be open to God. One needs to enter in faith.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Sabbath keeping is very much an act of faith. On this topic of rest in Hebrews 4:1-2, Herold Weiss understands the warning of failing to enter

¹⁴² Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 1998), 144.

¹⁴³ Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 148.

¹⁴⁴ Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 155.

¹⁴⁵ James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 84.

¹⁴⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 109.

¹⁴⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 107-108.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 110.

God's rest in three ways. Firstly, the "previous generations" fail to have a "hearing of faith (4:2)."¹⁴⁹ Secondly, the eternal rest is already available but the fault is not God keeping the door shut but the Israelites failing to open the door in faith. Thirdly, God's Sabbath rest transcends "historical particularities and distinctions between the old and the new."¹⁵⁰ He argues further that because of this, the Sabbath rest remains available for all, and not just for the Israelites of old. In fact, it is less a "commandment" and more of a "way of life."¹⁵¹ Like the kingdom of God, Weiss observes the Sabbath being available now, and yet the full rest is a promised future. He writes of a Sabbath rest as an "ultimate experience" that we cannot fully enjoy now, but can "aspire" toward.¹⁵² This progressive tension is the essence of Hebrews 3-4.

The Practicing of the Sabbath

Luther teaches practical steps with regards to Sabbath keeping. Like Calvin, Luther affirms the freedom from the mosaic laws, choosing to replace it with an attitude of grace. He raises the greater importance of an inner Sabbath, that is, "true Sabbath" is observed when our hearts celebrate it.¹⁵³ He reacts strongly against the Roman Church practice that he even suggests that "Sunday" rest is "optional."¹⁵⁴ Celebrating a holy day is essentially not one out of mundane and meaningless law, but is to be based on "love

¹⁴⁹ Herold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 156.

¹⁵⁰ Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 156.

¹⁵¹ Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 162.

¹⁵² Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 162.

¹⁵³ Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says – An Anthology*, (St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1328.

¹⁵⁴ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1329.

and need.”¹⁵⁵ One keeps the holy day, Sunday, Sabbath, or otherwise, not as a literal sense, but on practical reasons such as “bodily necessities,” worship in a congregation, restoration of man and beast, and to hear God’s Word.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, Luther makes a distinction between celebration and sanctification. While true Sabbath happens when the heart “celebrates” it, the Sabbath day is to be “sanctified.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, any keeping or any celebrations have to be done in the light of sanctifying the day, and thus the self for God alone. In fact, Luther’s thinking on freedom extends such sanctifying to “every day.”¹⁵⁸ All of these are possible when one is filled with hope. FF Bruce writes about the faith of Abraham and Sarah, that they are able to look for a different kind of city beyond Canaan simply because their eyes are fixed on a “well-established city of God” to be revealed in the future.¹⁵⁹ Reflecting on modern day worship, Thomas Long laments the manner in which church people go through the moments of singing, lifting hands up, and practicing the liturgy without much passion. He calls the Sabbath in Hebrews 3:7-11 a “mini-sermon” that contains three-points.¹⁶⁰ The first is that of disobedience, which can shut the door to the promised rest of God. The second is that every day is “today.”¹⁶¹ The third point is that time is in terms of “kairos.”¹⁶² With regards to rest, there are three themes.¹⁶³ Firstly, the Sabbath indicates God’s work has

¹⁵⁵ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1329.

¹⁵⁶ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1330.

¹⁵⁷ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1330-1331.

¹⁵⁸ Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1331.

¹⁵⁹ FF Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 293.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Long, *Interpretation – Hebrews*, Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 54.

¹⁶¹ Long, *Interpretation*, 54.

¹⁶² Long, *Interpretation*, 54.

¹⁶³ Long, *Interpretation*, 55.

been completed. Secondly, it is a pointer to the end of time. Thirdly, the rest represents a “possibility” to encourage the faithful.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the Sabbath rest is not just a concept, but a “quality of Christian life in the middle of time, a calm assurance of participating in the will of God.”¹⁶⁵ He exhorts readers to “enter that rest” as a way to practice the Sabbath.

Aida Besancon Spencer suggests fourteen principles to apply when practicing the Sabbath, seven from the Old Testament, and seven from the New. From the old Testament, one finishes work (Genesis 2:2), “rest” (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:9-11), “be holy” (Genesis 2:3), “praise” (Leviticus 23:2-44), “have faith” (Exodus 16:16-30), “remember the sign” (Exodus 31:13-17) and “liberate” (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).¹⁶⁶ From the New Testament, one can “have mercy” (Matthew 12:7), “serve” (Mark 2:27), “do good” (Luke 6:9), “liberate” (Luke 13:11-16), “heal” (Luke 14:3-5), seeing “God works” (John 5:17), and “worship Jesus” (John 9:5-38). Spencer affirms that one needs to rest with an awareness of God’s continual work. At the same time, one works with an anticipation of God’s future rest. This is all maintained with the fourteen themes.¹⁶⁷

Donald Conroy takes a more global perspective, in particular, the environment. Sabbath keeping is a way in which one abandons “utilitarian ethics” and to address the crisis of

¹⁶⁴ Long, *Interpretation*, 55.

¹⁶⁵ Long, *Interpretation*, 59.

¹⁶⁶ Aida Besancon Spencer, “Seven Principles for the Sabbath Day,” in the *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, ed. Edward O’Flaherty, et al, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 155-163.

¹⁶⁷ Spencer, *Seven Principles*, 155-163.

environmental degradation.¹⁶⁸ He makes three practical suggestions. Firstly, the practice of the Sabbath enables the fostering of an “awareness of the Divine” in society when one worships.¹⁶⁹ Secondly, one learns to be more environmentally sensitive on a regular basis when one stops work. Thirdly, one experiences the fuller experience of creation, harmony, and “spiritual dimensions” when one keeps Sabbath to “heal, sustain, and regenerate the natural ecology.”¹⁷⁰ Louis J. Mitchell learns from Jonathan Edwards’s puritan teachings on the Sabbath by suggesting that for one day a week, one can be do five things: 1) to be “exceedingly careful to abstain from sin,” 2) “abstain from worldly concerns,” 3) spending time in “religious activities,” 4) meditating on the “work of redemption,” 5) showing “mercy and love” to one another.¹⁷¹ Alexis McCrossen makes a practical suggestion for modern Americans, that one uses the day to escape the “selfish individualism and market capitalism.”¹⁷²

The entire Decalogue looks like a list of do’s and don’ts. Paul Kuntz paraphrases Richard Rolle’s writings on the Sabbath commandment in terms of three “senses.” Firstly, the sense of abandoning “all wicked behavior,” secondly, to abandoning “all physical acts” that hinders one’s attentiveness to God, and thirdly, to give oneself

¹⁶⁸ Donald B. Conroy, “Sabbath in an Age of Ecology within an Emerging Global Society,” in the *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, ed. Edward O’Flaherty, et al, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 164-178.

¹⁶⁹ Conroy, *Sabbath in an Age of Ecology*, 177.

¹⁷⁰ Conroy, *Sabbath in an Age of Ecology*, 178.

¹⁷¹ Louis J. Mitchell, “The American Sunday and the Formative Work of Jonathan Edwards,” in the *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, ed. Edward O’Flaherty, et al, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 179-185.

¹⁷² Alexis McCrossen, “That Sunday Feeling: Sundays in the United States,” in the *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend*, ed. Edward O’Flaherty, et al, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 121-133.

“entirely to God.”¹⁷³ While the first and second is a more determined aspect of not doing certain things, it is the third sense that is more positive as it relates to a quest for “perfection.”¹⁷⁴ This pattern of “Don’t do this but Do that” is also reflected in Thomas Aquinas’s interpretation of the Decalogue when he interprets the Sabbath command positively as “rest,” and negatively as to retreat from “distracting things.”¹⁷⁵ More importantly, three attitudes need to be adopted when obeying the Sabbath command. Aquinas advocates the practice of the Sabbath in one’s heart, one’s speech, and one’s actions.¹⁷⁶ What is critical to remember is that one should not just keep the Sabbath. One needs to keep it holy. This is the perspective of Marcus Bockmuehl, who argues that holiness is a “divine calling” for the people of God, and that the Law is essentially about “holy vs profane.”¹⁷⁷ In order to worship God, it is critical to embrace holy living and to reject unholiness, together. One example he brings up about holy living is in Jesus’ “hallowing of time” through prayer, in particular, the Lord’s prayer.¹⁷⁸ All of these suggest that on a practical scale, our framework for practicing the Sabbath has to be two-fold. Embrace holy living and reject unholiness in our thoughts, words, and actions.

¹⁷³ Paul Grimley Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History- Mosaic Paradigms for a Well-Ordered Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 36.

¹⁷⁴ Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History*, 36.

¹⁷⁵ Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History*, 64.

¹⁷⁶ Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ Markus Bockmuehl, “Keeping It Holy,” in the *I am the Lord Your God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten, et al, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 95-124.

¹⁷⁸ Bockmuehl, *Keeping It Holy*, 95-124.

Frederick David Niedermeyer calls the Sabbath day a “day for joy.”¹⁷⁹ Arguing for a strict observance of a weekly rest, he argues that non-observance will cause this day to degenerate into a “holiday” instead of a “holy day.”¹⁸⁰ He gives specific instructions to various groups. For people who prefer playing sports to worship on the Sunday, Niedermeyer argues that “worship and rest” is more needful than play and “pleasure.”¹⁸¹ For students asking about whether studying is permissible on the Lord’s Day, he argues that the act of hard study is “neither worshipful nor restful.”¹⁸² For busy ministers and pastors, Niedermeyer gives an exception, and suggests resting whenever they can.¹⁸³ To this latter point, it is helpful to consider Thomas Swears’s “spiritual disciples for pastors” for every approaching Sabbath.¹⁸⁴ In his book, Swears is calling for ministry workers to focus on spiritual formation that cultivates “integrity,” “study,” “prayer,” and to constantly prepare for a “more deliberate and focused presence” of God.¹⁸⁵

Karen Burton Mains makes a concerted effort to provide additional help to “make Sunday special.” She says that Sunday is the “high point of the week” that has been practiced by her family for over twenty years.¹⁸⁶ The rhythm of the preparation is like going up and down a mountain of seven days. The ascendancy begins on

¹⁷⁹ Frederick, David Niedermeyer, *The Ten Commandments Today*, (Boston, MA: Stratford, 1928), 60.

¹⁸⁰ Niedermeyer, *The Ten Commandments Today*, 75.

¹⁸¹ Niedermeyer, *The Ten Commandments Today*, 76.

¹⁸² Niedermeyer, *The Ten Commandments Today*, 78.

¹⁸³ Niedermeyer, *The Ten Commandments Today*, 79.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas R. Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991).

¹⁸⁵ Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath*, 9.

¹⁸⁶ Karen Burton Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 9.

Wednesday through Friday each week with the theme of “observe, Deuteronomy 5:12,” culminating in the Shabbat on Saturday, followed by a gentle descend from Monday through Tuesday with the theme of “remember, Exodus 20:8.”¹⁸⁷ Two principles guide her family in preparing for this special day each week: “Organizational” and “motivational.”¹⁸⁸ The former is to make sure that all necessary works are completed by Saturday afternoon. The latter springs from an awareness of the presence of Christ as a “special guest.”¹⁸⁹ There are also other preparatory work involved, especially in getting the heart and mind to be ready. This is done through setting aside things that distract.¹⁹⁰ Through prayer, one gets spiritually rehydrated.¹⁹¹ Other practical considerations include putting a card on the TV, book, or appliance to remind oneself of the spiritual high day. Mains concludes with a metaphor on how love can make Sunday special. It is like the cultivation of a relationship that starts when a young man comes a calling, to woo the girl. Sabbath is like a ring that a man gives to the woman as an engagement, a promise to marry. With this ring, one is regularly reminded to be faithful mentally, physically, and spiritually. During the ceremony at the bridal procession, celebrating the Sabbath is a celebration of the covenant keeping relationship. Each Sabbath reminds one that the courtship, the continued love affair between two faithful parties.

Finally, Beckwith and Stott advocates for a weekly rest, in particular Sunday, by saying that there are more similarities between the Sabbath and Sunday, than are

¹⁸⁷ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 21.

¹⁸⁸ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 65.

¹⁸⁹ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 65.

¹⁹⁰ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 88.

¹⁹¹ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 93.

differences. Rather than calling Sunday a new Sabbath, they prefer to see a “continuity between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day.”¹⁹² They list thirteen similarities and conclude with a reflection on the Early Church where the Sabbath was initially used as a “model” to understand the Lord’s Day, and subsequently to see it as a day that points to a New Testament fulfilment of a future world.¹⁹³

Sabbath as Rituals

In *A Day Apart*, Christopher Ringwald writes about his experience with the strict rituals adopted by a Muslim, a Jewish as well as his Roman Catholic families.¹⁹⁴ Within the context of a community, Ringwald experiences Muslim *Juma* on Friday with the Haqqies, the Jewish *Sabbat* on Saturday with the Kligermans, and the Roman Catholic *Lord’s Day* on Sunday with the Ringwalds. The common trait among all of them is that they all fervently keeps a day apart, holy to God. Ringwald’s experiences with the holy day occur within the context of families and communities.¹⁹⁵ Images of rituals are also richly demonstrated in Abraham Heschel’s classic book on the Sabbath. His daughter, Susannah fondly remembers the *Shabbat* ritual by her father, practiced unto perfection, memorized forever in her mind.¹⁹⁶ Such rituals of do-first-understand-later, helps prevent any believer from lapsing into laziness and skipping the Sabbath altogether. Within a community, everyone ensures all follow the procedures and rituals. There is no

¹⁹² Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday – a biblical and historical survey*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 43.

¹⁹³ Beckwith, et al, *The Christian Sunday*, 46-47

¹⁹⁴ Ringwald, *A Day Apart*.

¹⁹⁵ Ringwald, *A Day Apart*, 1-31.

¹⁹⁶ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), vii.

room for mavericks. With a community that accounts for one another, keeping the Sabbath ritual augers well for community bonding and building, even though it may not encourage individual creativity or personal liking. Here lies the second problem. Observing rituals can lead to accusations of Pharisaic legalism. Our modern pluralistic era is increasingly more suspicious of religions, regulations and rituals. What happens to cultures in mixed marriages? Anything that is orderly or religiously done can be replaced by derogative words like “legalism” or “legalistic.” I have personally experienced accusations that such rituals are tantamount to “Pharisaic legalism.” Besides this, there is another problem, which I call the “battery” problem. If we make the Sabbath a mindless ritual, we risk demoting the Sabbath as a spare day to recharge our personal spiritual batteries in order to be fully loaded and ready for the other six days. While it is true that rest helps to rejuvenate and refresh, turning the Sabbath into a prequel for the next six days idolizes work over rest! Using Heschel’s distinction of time (Sabbath) and space (other 6 days), such a way will turn our holy Sabbath “time” into another day of trying to conquer earthly “space.”¹⁹⁷ I think such an attitude only enslaves us further into the restlessness of the world, instead of freeing us from them. This is tempting especially for people in pastoral ministry. Thomas Swears suggests performing “spiritual disciplines” on the holy day, establishing even a Sabbath Bible reading plan for pastors.¹⁹⁸ Without community guidance, such a plan could become another “work-based” plan. Remember, *Shabbat* means, *no work* is to be done. Do something different.

¹⁹⁷ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 10.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 102-111.

Unfortunately, for many ministry workers, Bible reading can also become a form of work. The temptation for pastors is to use the Sabbath as another day to prepare for “ministry work.” Observing the Sabbath legalistically, and treating it merely like a day to recharge our ministry batteries are two ways of short-changing ourselves of what true Sabbath actually means. Sabbath is not an extension of our efforts to conquer our schedules. It is more than that. Abraham Heschel puts it eloquently, distinguishing the concepts of time and space: “There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.”¹⁹⁹

The literature suggests a third option. This is to see Sabbath keeping symbolically. In summary, personal disciplines in Sabbath keeping is helpful. Community rituals can help sustain individual devotions. Yet, we should not restrict Sabbath only to one day a week. How about adopting a Sabbatical rhythm instead? This is especially helpful for people who cannot afford to take a day off, for economic reasons or the nature of their job, like emergency workers.

Sabbath as Symbolic Rhythms

This is the approach of people such as Norman Wirzba and Christine Sine. Wirzba argues for an alternating rhythm of life between “rest” and “delight.”²⁰⁰ The secret to

¹⁹⁹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 3.

²⁰⁰ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

healthy and holy living is in knowing how to incorporate such a rhythm into our daily lives, that ultimately leads one toward worship of God.²⁰¹ Christine Sine moves from description of the Sabbath to seeing the Sabbath as *prescription* for a healthy life. Her book displays a heavy leaning toward balanced lifestyle in the name of “Sacred Rhythms.”²⁰² As a MD herself, I am not surprised that she dispenses this formulaic “pulse of life” for holistic living. While the approaches of Wirzba and Sine are commendable, and immensely practical, I cannot help but feel there is more to it. Wayne Muller’s excellent book also argues for a rhythmic lifestyle that can result in rest, renewal and delight despite our busy lifestyles.²⁰³ Yet, this third option is not without problems. For instance, the subjectivity problem in terms of who determines the right rhythm? What constitutes Sabbatical principle? While the Sabbath has been helpful for rest, rituals and rhythms, it will be unfortunate to stop at that. What about an eschatological perspective?

The Sabbath as Restoration: Beyond Rest, Ritual and Rhythm

We need to see the Sabbath as restoration of kingdom living on earth as it is in heaven. True Sabbath keeping restores the individual, the community and all of creation on earth. It also restores one’s hope and heightens one’s anticipation of the Coming Kingdom. The Sabbath command is *unique* and is able to help the believer nuance one’s relationship with God (first three commandments) with one’s relationship with fellow

²⁰¹ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 165.

²⁰² Christine Sine, *Sacred Rhythms*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

²⁰³ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, (Bantam Books, 1999).

human beings (final six). It is my belief that through the practice of the fourth commandment, and the living out of the Sabbatical principle, one is able to nuance the depth of loving God, as well as the breadth of loving fellow human people on earth as well as in heaven.

In restoration, one stills the soul toward God, and to enjoy the goodness of creation on earth. In restoration, keeping the Sabbath moves from static rituals to active rhythms, living as heavenly citizens on good earth. For the uninitiated, if we are in a restless mood, move to a ceasing mode (Stage 1). If we are confined to an individualized rest mode, move on to a community mode (Stage 2). If we need to move further, employ the rhythmic lifestyle approach (Stage 3). A disposition of restoration starts from where we are, always mindful of where we need to go. Thus, keeping the Sabbath is not simply restricted to the suspension of work. It is not even the same as attending Sunday services every week. I will not debate the usefulness of the Sabbath in terms of rest, rituals and rhythm. What is necessary is to not see them as an end in itself. The Sabbath is to be a restoration of God's original intent for the world (on earth), as well as the world to come (in heaven). The Sabbath is a time for us to make a distinction between what matters to the world, and what matters to God. The Sabbath is to be a restoration of our awareness that the Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Practicing the Sabbath is like cultivating a form of earthly spirituality that leads to heavenly reality. When one is able to practice Sabbath in terms of kingdom living on earth as it is in heaven, rest, rituals and rhythms would have been redeemed, making earthly living a heavenly one.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN & FINDINGS

We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.

- Abraham Joshua Heshel

The project is in three parts. The first part will be based on Interviews where participants from different churches in Canada and in Singapore will be involved. Some of these individuals have also ministered or attended Churches in other countries such as the United States, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Based on a set of 30 questions, participants are invited to provide a general snapshot of the Sabbath keeping awareness in their churches as well as in their personal lives. Most of this chapter will be based on the findings from the interviews. Most of the interviews are conducted online as well as through emails, as well as face to face chats. The results are then collected and observations are included in this chapter.

The second part of the project will be to formulate a model, beginning with inputs from the respondents to the interviews. The purpose is to introduce the Sabbath model of progression that enables an intentional Sabbath keeping that is restful, meaningful, and purposeful. Even doing nothing can have a particular sense of intentionality instead of an aimless state of nirvana. There will be practical steps toward enabling participants to adopt this three-stage model of Sabbath keeping.

The third part will be a preaching calendar, which can be implemented to reach a wider audience through the Sunday service, and through online dissemination over the Internet. Due to the scope of the topic, and the need for brevity in this thesis-project, only Part One will be conducted, researched, and reported. In part two, the model will be described in greater detail. Part Three is a teaching and preaching calendar that can arise out of the application of the model. Part Three will not be discussed in this report, but the author believes that the strength of the model can easily shape the details of any teaching and preaching curriculum.

Part I – Interviews and Questionnaire

An interview will be conducted either by person, telephone or through questionnaires. The 25 questions cover a host of areas surrounding the Sabbath. Participants are selected from a few different churches so as to gather a diversity of perspectives from different Christian denominations. Many of them are in various positions of leadership in their respective church communities. Some are pastors. Some are heads of ministry. Some are regular church attendees. It is hoped that these questions will not only bring about a general snapshot of Sabbath awareness in the church and their personal lives, but also to trigger a renewed interest in the Fourth Commandment. The respondents include those from Anglican/Episcopalian, Baptist, Brethren, Methodist, Pentecostal, as well as independent Churches. Since the focus of the teaching and preaching curriculum is geared toward a more evangelical based congregation or Protestant persuasions, the majority of respondents are expected to

come from these churches. The interviews contain four parts. The first part captures a snapshot of the respondents' name, church, and their denominational affiliation. The second part is called "Perspectives of the Sabbath" which tries to gauge the level of understanding regarding Sabbath keeping. Part Three deals with personal and individual practices of the Sabbath, if any. The purpose is to understand how these respondents apply their perspectives to their practices. Finally, Part Four offers a look ahead on what can be done on the part of the respondent as well as the teacher. The main thesis for the project is that Sabbath keeping is often talked about but inconsistently practiced. If we learn to see Sabbath keeping as a glimpse to the heavenly rest, not only will we look forward to gratitude for the past, and anticipating hope in the future, we will be able to practice weekly rest effectively.

Questions 1-5 ask about the "Perspectives of the Sabbath." The purpose is to capture a snapshot of the range of perspectives from a focus group of evangelicals with regards to Sabbath keeping. These people come from different denominations that are non-Roman Catholic, non-Jewish, and non-Eastern Orthodox. Questions 6-20 goes into personal practices to gain a broader understanding of how individuals keep the Sabbath. The purpose is to get an idea on how theory and theology are put into practice on a weekly basis. Question 21-30 looks to the future, as how individuals see their need for more teaching as well as more applications of the Sabbath commandment. At the end of the interview process, the aim is to learn how to anchor the teaching curriculum and preaching emphasis with regards to Sabbath Keeping as a spiritual ladder of trust.

Question #1: How Much Do You Know about the Sabbath?

About 40% of the respondents answer “a lot,” while the other 60% answered “a little.” The ones who answer a lot include pastors, teachers, theologians, and long time Church leaders. Those who answer a little represent a broad spectrum of laypeople.

Question #2 – Muslims observe the Juma on Friday. Jews observe Sabbath on Saturday. Christians go to Church on Sundays. Due to the closeness of Judaism and Christianity, do you think Sunday is the Christian “Sabbath?”

Half of the respondents indicated that the Sunday is the Christian Sabbath. The others are evenly divided into “No” or don’t know. There seems to be a diversity of understanding even within those who claim to know a lot about the Sabbath.

Question #3 – The Sabbath is for Jews. It does not apply to Christians. Do you agree?

Here a stark 90% of responses indicated non-agreement. In other words, nearly all agree that the Jewish Sabbath is not to be applied to Christians. This poses a contradiction to the views expressed in Question 2, where more than half say that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath. While there are some weaknesses in terms of the phrasing of the question, the point is that there is still some confusion as to what actually is the Sabbath. This is also linked to theological uncertainties surrounding the applications of Old Testament laws with regards to New Testament grace. The tension is evident here.

Question #4 – What do you believe is the purpose of the Sabbath?

There is wide agreement in 60% of the respondents that the purpose of the Sabbath is to rest physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. About 30% expressed that the Sabbath is for personal leisure and relaxation. All of the respondents said that there is a deeper purpose in the keeping of the Sabbath, but are not able to indicate what.

Question #5 – Of the Ten Commandments, some theologians have wondered why people observe most of the Commandments but pay less attention to the Fourth Commandment. Do you agree? Why?

The responses are evenly split between yes and no. For those who agree that the Fourth Commandment has been relatively ignored, they point to the Sunday as the evidence that the Fourth Commandment has been observed no less than the rest. One church elder (PC) points out that due to the lack of understanding of the Sabbath, and what it actually means, there is little evidence to suggest that people do not keep the Sabbath intentionally. Another respondent, a Methodist layperson (EK), wonders if the Sabbath means rest or worship as he thinks that the Sabbath is mainly for worship.

The opposing views say that one is unable to rest because of the hectic lifestyles. One Anglican parishioner (JW), says that once a week seems “too much of a commitment,” and that there is a lack of teaching of the Sabbath which further

compounds the problem. Interestingly, there is a comment about the Sabbath not having clear “boundaries” like the other commandments. There is also the observation that while the commandments that forbid murder, adultery, and so on tend to be “consequential,” there is no such equivalent for not keeping the Sabbath. Another respondent (TF) says that the Sabbath is “optional” for New Testament Christians in the sense that rest is for those who are “exhausted” instead of a “strict command.” Instead, Sundays ought to be a day in which people are free to do anything they want to do. One pastor (JT) replies in the affirmative that the Sabbath is not kept simply because people “tend to be selective in what they want to believe.”

Question #6 - Which is true for You?

This question probes deeper into the challenges behind Sabbath keeping. Multiple choices are allowed where respondents can answer more than one choice. About 30% attributed the challenge to too much work. Another 30% said that they do not know how to rest. Some tend to be restless even on a rest day. Another 20% admitted that they are not sure what to do with a Sabbath Day even if they allocate a day to it. A whopping 70% indicated none of the above.

Question #7 – Do you personally practice the Sabbath or keep a day a week for some kind of rest? Why or why not?

This question follows up on the previous to ask for more specifics regarding the individual’s personal practice. One pastor (JC) with a strong Jewish influence affirms religiously the keeping of the Sabbath on Sundays, equating his practice to the “Creation

Mandate” as well as in obedience to the “Ten Commandments.” Another respondent (PC) says that he practices the Sabbath but insists that it is not strictly a day of “doing nothing.” For him, worship is essentially the main thing in Sabbath keeping, followed by rest and relaxation with loved ones, and fellowship with fellow believers. One Pentecostal brother (MR) does not keep a full 24-hour day but adopts “blocks of time” for spiritual disciplines, like prayer, reflection and Bible reading. One layperson (ML) treats shopping alone as a form of “Sabbath” moment. A Baptist minister (MR) says that due to his minister duties, he keeps the Sabbath by resting on Wednesdays, where he avoids all kinds of “regular work.” A busy medical professional (JW) sees the challenge of time and work that makes the keeping of a restful 24-hour day very difficult. One member (TF) from an Evangelical Free Church insists that it is not necessary to keep a full day of rest per week. Instead, the best way to use Sundays is for relationship building.

Question #8 - What is your weekly Practice of the Rest Day?

The practices for all respondents center around worship, physical-spiritual-mental rest, relationship building, and a time of fellowship with one another. A majority of 50% indicates the practice of rest. More than 80% sees the rest day as a day to do “other stuff.” This largely parallels the way individual believers conduct their Sundays. One person (JT) even mentions fishing as a way to keep Sabbath. JC is the only respondent to indicate “good works” to be done that day. Another respondent (PC),

cannot seem to rest well due to the burdens in his heart about the church members' state of spiritual health.

Question #9 – Do you think your Church (or community) should have more teaching on Sabbath keeping especially in our crazy, noisy, and busy world?

A whopping 90% of the respondents reply YES! This is interesting because while all respondents reported a busy lifestyle and a need to rest, most are willing to accept more teaching instead of rest. In other words, they are willing to have more teaching in order to manage their own lives better. One lone respondent (TF) says no, giving the reason that he has “too much teaching and no time.”

Question #10 – If you can design your perfect rest day, what will it look like?

The response to this question will indicate how people generally spend their rest days. One respondent (JC) put relationship building, leisure, and works of mercy as his choice. There is a stark absence of the place of worship. Another (PC) sees the challenge of Sundays as rush days, preferring instead for a rest day to be a relaxing stroll with loved ones. The rest includes worshipping with fellow believers, catching up with friends, and even walking the dog! A time for contemplative moments and time alone is also a popular choice. The general practice is to do what one enjoys doing through the week. Interestingly, clergy people tend to take the perfect day for contemplative activities, like meditation and spiritual walks, while laypersons are more active in doing things, such as catching up on sleep, additional work, or simply meeting friends. One pastor (JT) makes a concerted attempt to integrate his faith and his activity like going outdoors to enjoy

God's creation. One layperson (TF) is more concerned about making sure none of his weekly demands invade his private time. It is a clear indication of how the rest of the week has influenced the use of the rest day. There seems to be a heavy emphasis of resting "from" the other days, rather than a looking forward to a new day. This retrospective mood dominates.

Question #11 – What are the challenges for sticking to a 1 rest day a week regimen?

Three things stand out. Technology being always ON and busy lifestyles account for 64% of the respondents. More than 70% mentions "inner restlessness." Work from the office (including clergy) tends to be low. Even those who are medical professionals and clergy place their erratic nature of work as a low challenge. This provides a clue that external work may be challenging, but are quite well managed. It is the invasiveness of technology, a busyness that comes from beyond the office, that creates lots of inner restlessness.

Question #12 – Which attitude closely represents yours?

This question aims to find out the importance individuals place on the rest day. Most of the users link the importance of Sundays more as gatherings with fellow believers. All believe in the keeping of some kind of Sabbath per week, but are liberal in terms of which day to practice the rest day. One respondent even requests for help on how to rest. A majority of the respondents are open about other possible uses of the Sabbath day.

Question #13 – Do you believe that there is something more to Sabbath keeping than simply taking a break once a week?

This question attempts to find out how prevalent is the openness to the interpretation of the Sabbath. All respondents said yes, meaning there is a strong eschatological element in general.

Question #14 – Suppose you are convinced that the Sabbath is MORE than simply a rest day, will you make a special effort to observe it regularly?

This question rides on the previous one. A majority (80%) gives a resounding “absolutely” while 2 respondents give a “somewhat yes” opinion.

Question #15 – How Important is it to observe a 24-hour rest day per week?

This question aims to see how rigid individuals are with regards to their desire for something more than the Sabbath rest. The answers are fairly distributed. The majority (50%) says it is “very important,” while 20% says it is somewhat important. The other 20% are more inclined toward a neutral stance. While most agree that it is important to practice a rest day, they differ in the extent and are quite restrained with regards to a strict observance of a 24-hour day. This is understandable as evangelicals tend to be more careful about adopting any Pharisaic style legalism. After all, the gospels frequently depict Jesus reprimanding the Pharisees for their inflexible approach with regards to Sabbath keeping.

Question #16 – If you cannot have a 24-hour rest, what is your alternative?

This question seeks to find out the levels of alternatives respondents have with regards to working out a time for their Sabbath rest. The answers are fascinating. JC indicates a rest-routine arrangement where a pattern can be established. The full Sabbath can be a “desired end state.” Another respondent, (PC) who is in his retirement years sees every day as his Sabbath day, while he admits that Sundays are special. PC also says that he can freely keep Sabbath anytime as he has no work to burden him. He used to be a busy medical professional. One executive (FT) claims that even if work interferes on his rest time, he can always make up for it another time. One pastor (JT) gives an insightful way of observing his rest day by “doing something different.” This means that work or any activity itself can be a form of rest too!

Question #17 – What do you normally do on a Sunday (or any other rest day?)

One respondent (JC) follows a methodical Church-fellowship-work format on a Sunday. As he follows the Jewish Sabbath strictly, he observes Sabbath on Friday-Saturday. This is consistent in his regular anticipation of the time leading up to the Sabbath. PC, the retired Church elder, packs in a lot of work, like rushing to church, fellowship lunch in the afternoon, followed by a quick nap. In the evenings, he reads the bible, prays, and manages to squeeze in an hour at the golf driving range. Sometimes, he uses the day to prepare for his mid-week Bible studies. Another busy professional (JW) takes the Sunday to do what she is unable to do during the week. Grocery shopping!

Question #18 – How disciplined are you with regards to Sabbath keeping?

The responses are varied. The “very disciplined” comprises 45% while one admits to being “very lax” about it. The rest are moderately disciplined about Sabbath keeping.

Question #19 – When was the last time you have enjoyed a Sabbatical moment, or a great restful time? Describe.

It is interesting that the answers for most are somewhat non-committal, ranging from a subjective “last week” to some leisure activity like walks or board games with family. JC is convicted about keeping the Sabbath rest, that he emphatically maintains the 24-hour rest in itself as the best restful time. FT the busy executive mentions technology as a way to catch up with friends. He finds the use of emails, Facebook, catching up on news and uses technology in general as a way to rest! One respondent (ML) says that her moment was at a personal retreat at a monastery three years ago where there are no worries about household chores, technological interruptions. A busy pastor admits he “cannot remember” when was the last time he has had a Sabbatical moment. JW sees taking a holiday as her Sabbatical moment in which there is no rush to do stuff, but simply slowing down her pace, and casually observing life. TF says that the last time he has had the rest was before marriage, and then before having kids. JT says that when his wife is around, he can be freed to do other stuff which is his moments where he can practice his Sabbath.

Question #20 – Assuming you practice the Sabbath, which benefit appeals most to you?

This question looks for initial understanding of what are the benefits of keeping Sabbath. About 50% says that the Sabbath is a way to discern their spiritual journey. About 50% opts for “Deeper Restfulness” while 20% says that they learn to distinguish needs from wants.

Question #21 – If there is a curriculum to teach Sabbath keeping in church or in a community, how interested would you be?

This question probes the level of interest with regards to their openness learning about the Sabbath. All the respondents indicated a fairly high interest.

Question #22 – The Sabbath gives us a glimpse of the heavenly rest. Do you agree?

A huge 90% says yes while 10% indicates this as a new concept to him.

Question #23 – Clergy, pastors, ministers, and certain professionals tend to work long hours. Sometimes they have to work 7 days a week for a long time. What can you do to support such people?

This question focuses on pastoral care for people who are not able to observe the regular Sabbath. It opens up opportunities for individuals to be creative about how to support such people. JC does not see the problem with long hours. In fact, the key thing is not time but learning to separate one day from the other six days. The main thing is to establish a biblical understanding of the Sabbath first. Everything else, such as the number of hours, or the level of keeping Sabbath will then be based on how

convicted the individual is with regards to the biblical Sabbath. PC on the other hand begins with a concern for their physical rest. Saying that these ministry workers or professionals need to know their limits in the first place. He says that workaholic people are actually addicts to work, even though they may enjoy what they are doing. He concedes that sometimes the job requires them to be active 7 days a week, saying that “everyone wants a rest” but not everyone “can afford it.” In general, he expects pastors and ministers to have at least a day off to rest. Nevertheless, the pastoral ministry is a high calling, which is why not everyone is suitable for this kind of work. A Bible teacher (MLR) talks about the need to be faithful in supporting these people. Business executive (FT) says that professionals working long hours need to know how to maintain balance between work and rest. He says that the ministers he knew rest on Mondays. He suggests reminders for such people to rest. For clergy, he will remind them to make intentional efforts to rest. For business professionals, he will remind them that there is more to life than making a living. EK, a publisher with a book company will respect the off days of these people and be ready to assist when called upon. ML and MR shares about spiritual disciplines of upholding them in prayer, or provide encouragement for them from time to time. JW recommends supporting these people administratively, and to tell people to adjust their expectations about their pastors’ availability. She even says that pastors ought not to be subject to a 24x7 window of availability. TF says that one can “connect” with them so as to provide moral encouragement. JT prefers to get these busy individuals to intentionally carve aside time to rest.

Question #24 – With technology use on the rise, what do you think about the practice of a technological Sabbath? (For example: one day a week, disconnect)

JC and PC agrees that a weekly break from technology is “absolutely needed.” PC even says that for many years, he had survived without a computer or a cell phone and “yet we survived.” On the other hand, MRC and FT are not comfortable with the idea. This is because technology has integrated so much into the lives of people that technology is not only ubiquitous but a critical medium of communications for many people, especially those in ministry. FT finds it necessary to rest, but not necessary for a draconian abstention from technology totally. He mentions some leisurely and rest activities require technology in order to function. EK says this is a “new idea” while both JW and MR agree that disconnecting technology a day a week contributes to greater restfulness. JT concludes by saying that he has tried but not always successful in switching off technology once a week.

Question #25 – Do you need help in keeping the Sabbath?

The purpose is to gage the level of need in Sabbath keeping for these busy people. Most of the respondents (50%) said yes while 40% said no. One respondent offers others as an alternative without indicating any details.

Question #26 – Which best represents the Sabbath keeping attitude in your community?

The purpose of this question is to take a snapshot of the attitude toward the Sabbath in the communities that these respondents are in. The responses range from

moderate to very lax attitudes about keeping the Sabbath. Most of the respondents prefer to take the moderate stance of not being legalistic on one hand, and not too laissez-faire on the other.

Question #27 – Being intentional is increasingly an essential spiritual discipline. In our busy world, it is getting more important to establish a sense of rhythm in work and rest. If there is a way to be intentional about Sabbath keeping, how interested are you personally? How keen will you be in participating in a program for your Church?

The purpose of this question is to establish the possibility of Sabbath keeping as a spiritual discipline. In many spiritual formation books, Sabbath keeping is increasingly a common item in their practices of spirituality. The majority of the responses indicate a moderate to high level of keenness. One person says he is not keen.

Question #28 – Which activity best represents Sabbath keeping for you?

A high of 60% says that it is for worship. About 20% says “personal rest” while the rest says relationship building.

Question #29 – If you want to find out more about the Sabbath, where do you go to?

The purpose of this question is to determine how individuals learn about the Sabbath. The most popular choices are books (80%), the Internet (50%), followed by pastors (30%) and teachers (20%).

Question #30 – Additional Thoughts From Respondents

JC laments that the Fourth Commandment has moved from a “commandment” to merely “becoming a suggestion” in the lives of many Christians. He warns that man is dangerously trying to change God’s commands into guidelines of convenience. In fact, once the mind has decided on what it wants, everything can be changed, including God’s commandments on the Sabbath. He says that the Bible says very little about “how to practice” the Sabbath. Instead, the Sabbath is an opportunity for man to obey God and to trust God. Concluding like Heschel, he says that it is not about man keeping the Sabbath, but the Sabbath keeping man. For PC, this survey raises more questions. He asks about whether the rest day is a literal 24-hour day or otherwise. He is not sure whether the modern Christian Sunday keeping is the same as the Jewish Sabbath. MRC says this is a “good survey.” FT says that the level and intensity of Sabbath keeping is largely dependent on one’s phase of life, whether married or unmarried, studying or working full-time. He gives the example of a busy family man with kids, as well as the large circle of friends he constantly busy himself with. In such a case, Sabbath becomes pushed to the background as he prioritizes these responsibilities and relationships first. JW says that the survey has caused her to “think” about the Sabbath. She believes that technology is making Sabbath keeping more difficult, and desires activities that cultivate more contemplation.

Some General Observations

In Part One, people in general are aware of the Sabbath, and that it is in the Old Testament, especially the Ten Commandments and the Creation mandate. When it comes to whether Sunday is actually the Christian “Sabbath,” there is less agreement. The range of answers fluctuates between yes and no, indicating that there is little common ground with regards to what Sabbath actually means for the Christian. The confusion is further exuberated by the conflict of answers between questions 1 and 2. A whopping 91% of respondents do not agree with the Jewish Sabbath being applied legalistically for Christians, and yet they consider Sunday the “Sabbath.” There is confusion with regards to what Sabbath is, and the difference between the Jewish Saturday and the Christian Sunday.

Secondly, there is also a lack of agreement with regards to the place of the Fourth Commandment. The evenly split answers with regards to the ignorance of the Sabbath command seem to suggest a diverse interpretation of Sabbath rest. Among the busy respondents, there is a *laisse faire* approach that appears to let work replace the importance of rest. The two top preferences for Sabbath practice is worship on Sundays followed by personal rest, leisure and time to build relationships. This suggests a inadequate understanding of the Sabbath which leads to a dysfunctional practice of the Sabbath.

Thirdly, question #6 about what one should do about the Sabbath is telling.

People are generally not sure which results in a lack of conviction. A large number (73%) do not seem to know what to do.

Fourthly, it is seen that those who know the Sabbath implications on a theological level tend to be more conscientious about it. Among laypersons, many adopt worship and rest as the main reasons to keep Sabbath. The one respondent most vigilant about Sabbath keeping is also the one closest to the Judaic tradition. This is another sign of how Christians have generally moved away from the Jewish Sabbath, toward a liberated practice of free grace and free choice. There is a marked level of caution with regard to being legalistic or being accused of being labelled a Pharisee with regards to Sabbath keeping.

Fifth, 90% of the respondents are open to having more teachings about the Sabbath. This represents an opportunity for a Sabbath curriculum to inform theologically, biblically, and practically. The challenge is to work in a practical and workable program to encourage people to sign up for the course. The main challenge is to find a way to bring motivation to these individuals about a purpose that will motivate Sabbath keeping. The author believes that if the reasons are clear, individuals will learn to deal with their busyness and time management.

Sixth, it is encouraging that all of the respondents believe that there is something more to Sabbath keeping than merely taking a break. This represents an opportunity for education as well as for an openness toward inculcating Sabbath rhythms and practices.

Seven, question 16 reveals a creative range of answers with regards to how to practice Sabbath in the midst of a busy and hectic life. It points to the fact that the more important thing is not the details of Sabbath keeping, but the motivation and purpose behind Sabbath keeping.

Eight, it is significant to see 50% of the respondents who indicated the Sabbath as a spiritual journey. This reveals an opportunity to personalize the keeping and the practice of the Sabbath. If things are made more personal, people will be more willing and convicted to observe it.

Nine, many respondents are sensitive to the plight of workers who do not have the luxury of a 24-hour rest. If these people observe Sabbath themselves, they will be able to be more effective in helping ministry workers, professionals, and emergency workers who toil long hours through the week.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement.get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Stairway Model of Trust

This project and curriculum focuses on applying Sabbath keeping through presenting a stairway model of trust. The focus will be on what the model seeks to accomplish. Based on this model, called the “Stairway of Trust model,” it is hoped that current literature that advocates the practice of the Sabbath can be applied at various stages without necessarily being seen as diverse opinions without a common ground. Even among evangelicals, there are varying opinions regarding what exactly the Sabbath represents, and how it is to be practiced.¹ Gaffin summarizes the two extreme views with regards to the Sabbath, saying that on the one hand, there is the “antinomian view” that is prevalent in some post-Reformation circles.² On the other hand, there is the seventh-day Adventist view that advocates a strict 24-hour Sabbath keeping.³ From

¹ Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath – 4 Views*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic Press, 2011).

² Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, (Ross-shire, GB: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 11.

³ Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 11.

the results of the brief survey and interviews done in this report, as well as the theological and biblical research, most evangelicals place themselves squarely between these two extremes.

The basic conviction this author has is that if there is no goal, there is no intentional progression toward it. The Sabbath is indeed made for man, and it will be a shame if it is pushed to the sidelines, only to be ignored or used when the need arises. While one is free to practice the Sabbath according to their freedoms or limitations, there is inherently something mysterious and spiritual about Sabbath keeping. It points not only to something more. It points to an enlarging awareness of the kingdom of God. This is something that is affirmed by many of the respondents, but lacks a certain sense of purpose or direction apart from simply a regular exercise of rest, relaxation, relationship building, or worship on Sundays.

The author does not seek to re-invent any of the brilliant findings by the many theologians, thinkers, and philosophers in the rich school of literature and Sabbath practices. Instead, this model gives readers a handle on how to read Sabbath literature with the help of this model. At the same time, the model is intended to allow the various interpretations of the Sabbath to co-exist, without themselves being diminished in importance. The model is presented on the next page.

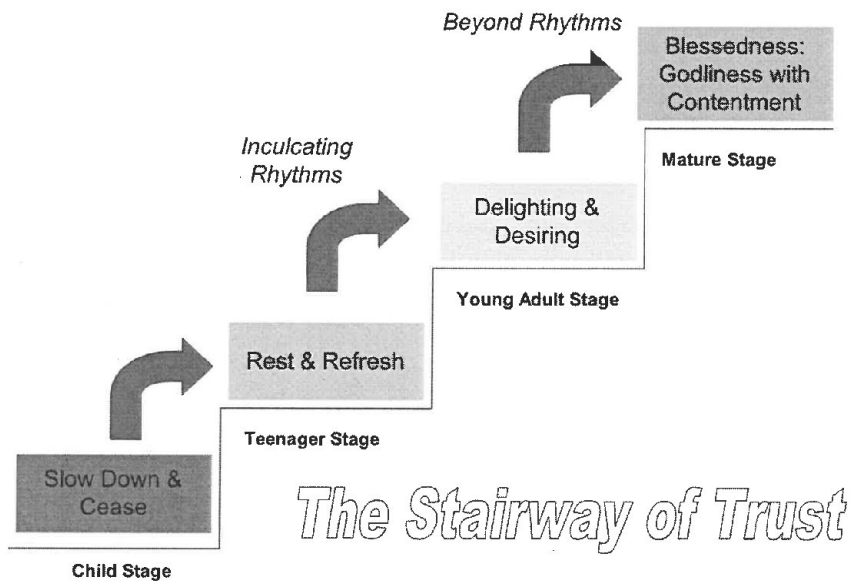


Figure 1 - Stairway of Trust Model

Part One is about starting a Sabbath keeping routine and ritual on a weekly basis. This is called a “child stage,” a weekly plan to slow down and cease. A lot of focus will be on **physical rest**, and any activity that contributes to the practice of it. This will be accomplished chiefly through setting restrictions on our regular activities and apply limits in what can occupy our lives. The curriculum will include a teaching course, weekly exercises and commitment, and accountability to one another. The basic assumption is that this is to be done on a weekly basis. It is a good beginning. Like a child, one learns the ropes of discipline and keeping to the rituals of Sabbath keeping in a somewhat legalistic way. Lauren Winner, one with Jewish roots who has embraced Christianity,

confesses how she “miss Sabbaths” on which she can truly rest.⁴ For Winner, it is an interesting journey from a strict 24-hour Sabbath keeping to a freedom of choosing how the Sabbath can be kept. Despite the freedom, she fondly remembers the early years of Sabbath keeping that are restful. Winner talks about the Jewish practice that deserves a serious consideration. According to the midrash on the book of Exodus, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” which literally means “we will do and we will hear” seems to put the “doing” before the hearing.⁵ She explains that it is in the “doing” that will result in greater faith and understanding.⁶ This goes against the grind of the beliefs of many evangelicals, which prefer a “believing” first prior to “belonging” or “behaving” stage. As a result, some writers are advocating for a more inclusive attitude among Christians in order to reach the world for Christ. For instance, Kevin Harney who is passionate about infusing evangelistic fervour in congregations argues for inviting people to “belong” to the congregation first before they will even “believe” in the message.⁷ Sabbath keeping is an opportunity to change our perspectives, or to be open to paradigm shifts. This in itself can become a very restful disposition, to do things a little differently than the other six days. That is why many workers are more effective after taking a break to do different things. There is another benefit to an initial strict observance.

Like many practices, we need to start somewhere. Instead of looking at the negative side of strict Sabbath observance, Winner reminds us of Madeline L’Engle’s

⁴ Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), viii.

⁵ Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, x.

⁶ Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, x.

⁷ Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 65.

explanation of musical notes. One may “not necessarily enjoy the etudes” and may choose instead to go to the “sonatas and concertos.”⁸ What is most necessary is the training through the use of the etudes that bring significance to the rest of the music. This underlines the essence of the spiritual journey in Christ, that it is not the good circumstances that lift us up or the bad situations that bring us down. It is to travel toward God in spite of good or bad circumstances. If the other six days represent the etudes, that one day a week represents the sonatas and concertos. This analogy can be extrapolated to seeing the etudes as our regular practices of the Sabbath, and the sonatas and concertos becoming more vibrant as we approach the rest of God.

Many of the respondents do not have a Jewish upbringing, and are less informed about the place of the Sabbath in their faiths, unlike Jewish families and traditions. This does not mean they cannot benefit from Sabbath keeping. All of the respondents go to Church each Sunday. Some do so religiously. Beckwith and Stott suggest four ideals of this practice.⁹ It is firstly a witness of the Lord’s Resurrection; secondly a weekly opportunity to do rest, worship, and acts of mercy; thirdly, a day to set restrictions and limits on ourselves; and fourthly, to be free to celebrate this day as “sharers of the New Covenant.”¹⁰ This child stage essentially covers the first three “ideals” shared by Beckwith and Stott. Marva Dawn proposes a four-fold Sabbath practice of “ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting” of which this child stage covers largely the first two

⁸ Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, x.

⁹ Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 142-144.

¹⁰ Beckwith, et al, *The Christian Sunday*, 142-144.

practices.¹¹ Learning to stop and take time to re-orientate is critical to any journey. This is what the child stage seeks to do. Through an intentional spiritual discipline of Sabbath keeping, one frees oneself from the tyranny of the urgent, or the busyness of the world, to say no to the domain of work, and yes to the world of rest. Sabbath keeping is keeping in step with what God has created man to be. In summary, the child stage is essentially learning to stop, and to keep ourselves from the tyranny of work, or anything that attempts to lock us in. Many respondents have indicated the challenge of technology that attempts to lock them into having to connect and to work electronically. They want to rest well, but this requires the hard decision to *stop* using their technological devices. Any activity that enables us to stop and to cease our dependence on these devices can be a helpful spiritual pause to help us grow. The child stage is essentially that.

Part Two is called the “adolescent stage” that moves beyond mere physical restrictions toward a more positivistic practice of appreciation of rest and refreshment. This involves the practice of artistic appreciation, music, enjoying the fellowship of friends and family, and other activities that contribute to **emotional and mental resting**. The intention is that once people get used to a weekly Sabbath keeping, it becomes a ritual or a routine they are at least familiar with. When Sabbath keeping becomes a conscious spiritual practice, growth has happened. A weekly ritual becomes a personal pattern of rhythms. Several respondents have shared about their difficulty in sticking to

¹¹ Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

a 24-hour per week regimen simply because of the nature of their work or the lifestyle demands. For instance, many are using emails not only for work but for social media. In such situations, a rhythm of rest and relaxation is the preferred choice. Lynne Baad advocates for this kind of Sabbath rhythm. She says that such rhythms promote a sense of “freedom.”¹² Such a rhythm does not mean it is a haphazard practice of a little rest here or a little rest there. The crux of her book is that it is possible to rest in spite of our busyness. Her book talks about the different “patterns of Sabbath observance.”¹³ Wayne Muller agrees with this approach as his main concern is with the world’s tendency to lose themselves in the mad race for “success” and productivity.¹⁴ In this stage, Sabbath keeping can grow beyond simply a 24-hour day rest to become a pattern of rest. For Muller, the benefit is rest, renewal, and subsequently delight. For Baab, the benefit is freedom. Tilden Edwards says that the benefit also includes a time for “healing.”¹⁵ Norman Wirzba says that the keeping of the Sabbath is to allow ourselves to get a “better look” at life.¹⁶ Dorothy Bass says that the Sabbath is a time to rest *from* work, commerce, worry, and all manner of our engagement with the world, so that we are free to embrace creation for its own sake, through worship.¹⁷ This adolescent stage is when we are learning to remember the Sabbath principle not only once a week, but as regular as possible. Rigidity is not the preference. Regularity is. With this regular

¹² Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping- Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005).

¹³ Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 21.

¹⁴ Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, (New York, NY: Bantam, 1999), 1.

¹⁵ Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time*, (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1992), 9.

¹⁶ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 41.

¹⁷ Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 64-70.

practice, we learn to see each day more thankfully rather than grudgingly. Keri Wyatt Kent says that such a rhythm of practice promotes a lifestyle of simplicity that we can be “intentional without becoming institutional.”¹⁸ Once the keeping of the Sabbath becomes more than a weekly ritual, Dawn argues that the Sabbath rhythm produces a benefit comes in the form of a deeper sense of “calling” that fuels servanthood.¹⁹ Thomas Swears says that this Sabbath rhythm in itself becomes a source of “spiritual formation for pastors.”²⁰ There is more. When the rituals and rhythms are established, what it does is to prepare our hearts to be ready to appreciate creation as God has meant us to do. This leads to Stage III which is called the “Young Adult Stage.”

In this third stage, one is encouraged to move beyond mere rituals or rhythms. It proposes a lifestyle in which one learns to incorporate rhythms of work and play, in a manner that demonstrates spiritual wisdom and a consciousness of God’s time in “kairos.” Marva Dawn’s description of delight as a way of Sabbath keeping is something very liberating in stoic work environments. She admits her gratitude to her parents for instilling in her at a very young age the ritual of “regular worship and tithing.”²¹ Dawn writes,

Because there is nothing we have to do, we are free suddenly to say yes to invitations, to read fairy tales, to be children, to discover the presence of God hidden all around us. To keep the Sabbath invites us to have festival fun, to play, to enjoy our guests and our activities, to relish the opportunity for worship, to

¹⁸ Keri Wyatt Kent, *Rest – Living in Sabbath Simplicity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 11.

¹⁹ Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 1.

²⁰ Thomas R. Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath: Spiritual Discipline for Pastors*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 11-22.

²¹ Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 208.

celebrate the eternal presence of God Himself. We feast in every aspect of our being – physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual – and we feast with music, beauty, food, and affection.²²

Mark Buchanan, a busy pastor also says that when the Sabbath has been restored into one's life, one's soul is also restored and be made "whole."²³ Most of the respondents in the survey agree that there is a need to rest and worship, but fail to suggest any kind of delight beyond such simple leisure, walks or even fishing. Dan Allender gives us a glimpse of the benefit of Sabbath in the form of it reminding him about "the slower, intentional, sweet pace of the Sabbath."²⁴ At the young adult stage, one is beginning not only to stick to a routine of rest, but to embrace and delight in the whole process as well. It is like saying that the whole pattern of Sabbath keeping has taken on a life of its own. One learns to cruise along not because one has to, but because one wants to. When this delight is in place, we are ready to enter the "mature stage."

Stage four is called the "mature stage" that is described as a stage of blessed godliness with contentment. It is mature because one has gone beyond the rituals or the routines of Sabbath keeping. It has also gone beyond the stage of intentional "programming" of a kind of rhythms in our lives. Learning to be content is a biblical

²² Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 202.

²³ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006), 157.

²⁴ Dan Allender, *Sabbath*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas-Nelson, 2009), 193.

practice. Reflecting on the Sabbath, Heschel calls it a “palace in time.”²⁵ This stage is what he calls, “no strife and no fighting, no fear and no distrust.”²⁶ Remarkably, this is something that strict Sabbatarians appear to be strongest at. Bacchiocchi calls this stage as follows: “True rest is to be found not in places or through pills but rather in a right relationship with a Person.”²⁷

Herbert Saunders sees the Sabbath as a “symbol of creation and re-creation.”²⁸ Saunders tries to connect the tensions that appear between the Jewish Sabbath and the freedom of a Christian in Christ. He sees the place of the Sabbath a serious responsibility on their part to show the world the necessity of living a meaningful life. He writes, “Belief in Christ is at the heart of the Christian gospel. But the Sabbath provides the spiritual vehicle through which the redeemed Christian finds moral and spiritual expression. Life without the Sabbath is a mere shadow of what life ought to be.”²⁹

The results of the survey have not gone this far to explore the deeper essence of Sabbath spirituality. Perhaps, that is a sign that we are not there yet. Many remain in the early stages as described in this model.

²⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (New York, NY: FSG, 2005), 12-24.

²⁶ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 23.

²⁷ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 236.

²⁸ Herbert E. Saunders, *The Sabbath: Symbol of Creation and Re-Creation*, (Plainfield, NJ: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1970).

²⁹ Saunders, *The Sabbath*, 100.

Limitations of the Thesis/Model

Like all models, this stairway of trust model has limitations. The first limitation is in the brevity of this thesis report. For a subject so large, it is impossible to squeeze everything into a short report. Having said that, there is lots of other literature that the author has not included.

Second, the author acknowledges that more work needs to be done with regard to supplying both empirical support as well as qualitative analysis. The interview questions have been sent to about 18 persons of which only about 60% responded. The survey has been conducted online and uses a computer system that has been bogged down by technical issues. Thankfully, the majority of responses have come in to enable the preparation of this report. The author is aware that with more inputs, the survey will be stronger and more inclusive of the different perspectives of the Sabbath.

Third, there is a difference in understanding of what Sabbath is. Half of the respondents say that it is the Jewish Saturday, while the other half seems to use the Sabbath and the Sunday rather interchangeably. With greater education and knowledge, the author agrees that the survey results may result in a significant shift in opinions of the respondents.

Fourth, rest can be very subjective. While most of the respondents say that they see the Sabbath as an opportunity to rest, they are not exactly sure what constitutes true rest. The same person may have restfulness on one Sunday, but become restless the next Sunday. Moreover, the results from the survey are also influenced by the time

and busyness of the respondent in question. For instance, a busy work professional may fill out the survey very quickly as a favour to the author. If the same survey is taken at a more leisurely pace and time, the results may differ in terms of its level of contemplation and intentionality.

Fifth, there is a possibility of using this model to dismiss away some of the other literature of the Sabbath. This is not true, but like many models, it is vulnerable to various interpretations. The use of the model is to supplement or to complement existing works in the market, to help readers and practitioners obtain a handle to the vast amount of literature and spiritual practices.

Sixth, the survey covers only a focused group of evangelicals, selected from different churches of varying backgrounds. Future surveys can include a wider range or Judeo-Christian groups who can enrich the overall conversation. Having said that, this report is aware of the greater diversity of views available out there.

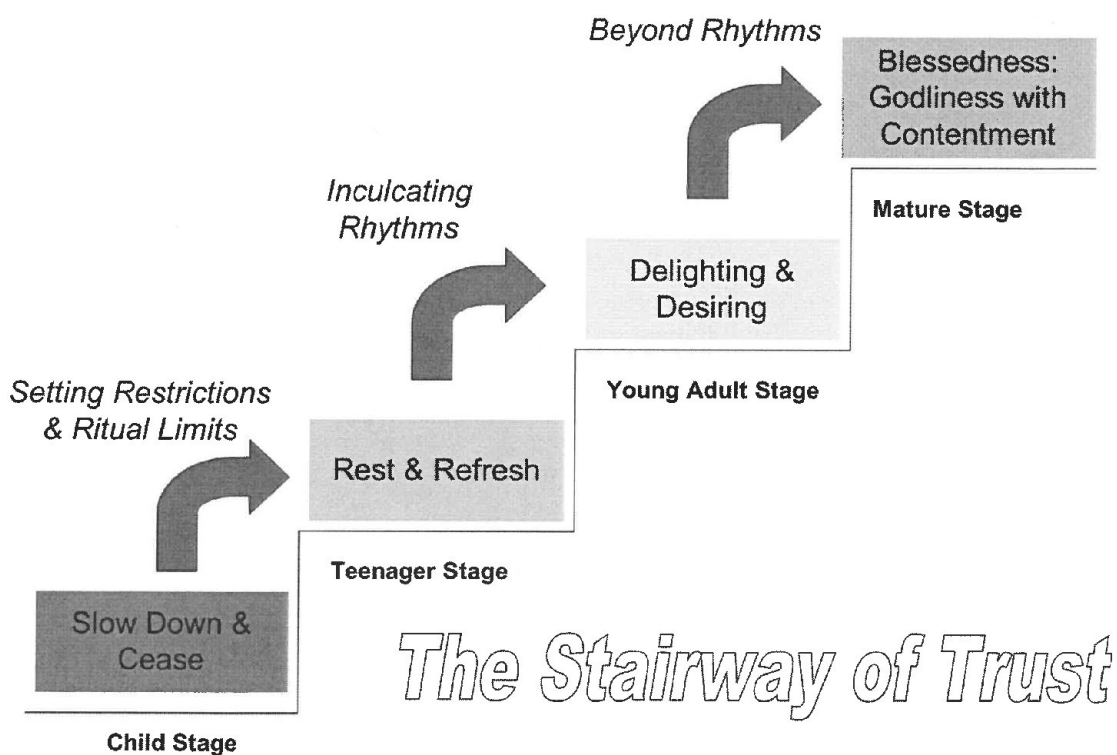
Seven, the number of closed-ended questions can be reduced so that space can be available for open-ended ones. This will enable more qualitative inputs to enable individuals to be free to share about their Sabbath keeping styles. Moreover, the research has not touched on the role of sports. For instance, if a major sports event is to clash with normal worship services and time, which will the believer choose? How does that impact Sabbath observance?

Conclusion

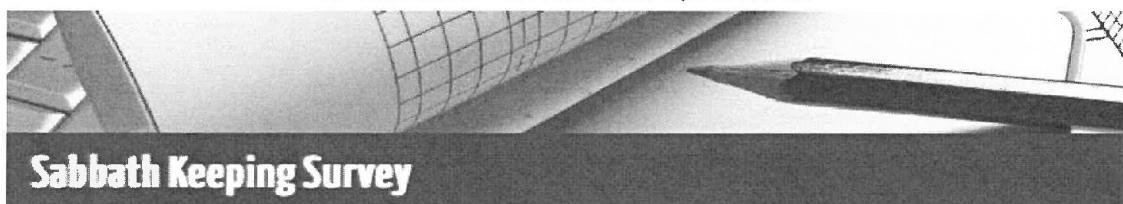
This thesis project has sought to bring together a biblical survey and theological perspectives surrounding the topic of Sabbath keeping. It has invited several respondents from various churches to provide a snapshot of the state of Sabbath keeping in their respective communities as well as their personal lives. It introduces a model of progression called the “Stairway of Trust” model that advocates for an intentional practice of Sabbath keeping. In doing so, it aims to enable the recognition of the Sabbath practice as a form of spiritual discipline and a journey toward the heavenly rest. The child stage enables one to stop, and to pause on a weekly basis so as to be awake to the biblical aspect of Sabbath keeping. The teenager stage is a natural progression from ritual to rhythms of Sabbath keeping. This stage is even more important as society continues its relentless cycle of busyness and rush. This stage goes beyond a rigid once a week practice toward a rhythm and a pattern of observing Sabbath anytime according to one’s schedule. This does not mean the first stage has been eradicated. It means that the person would have appreciated the Sabbath keeping in greater detail. The young adult stage goes beyond mere rhythms to point one toward delighting and desiring God. The final stage means a state of godliness with contentment, something that all believers are constantly exhorted toward. It is a given that teaching remains a key component in the education of the laity. More importantly, once the motivation and the purpose have been assimilated, the details and the creativity will naturally follow. This is the author’s deepest hope.

APPENDIX A – THE SABBATH AS A “STAIRWAY OF TRUST” MODEL

The Sabbatical Ladder of Trust: Freedom of movement toward heavenly rest



APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Sabbath Keeping Survey

My name is Conrade, and I am currently working on a thesis-project as part of my requirements for my Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The project is about cultivating greater awareness of Sabbath keeping so as to enable one to look forward to the heavenly rest as promised in Hebrews 3-4. In the research, I have done a historical survey of Sabbath keeping and consolidated a list of theological perspectives by different groups. Your input will enrich my work as it helps me get a snapshot of Sabbath awareness in various Christian communities. I will be using the term 'Sabbath' interchangeably with 'rest day.' The latter applies if you prefer to use Sunday rather than the Jewish term 'Sabbath.'

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this survey. The survey takes about 30 minutes to complete. There are about 30 questions in this survey. Some questions will require more time, while others take a few seconds. I will appreciate any reflection or inputs toward the end. If you have further questions regarding this survey or project, please email me at cyap@sabbathwalk.org for clarification or for any communications.

If you are able to complete the survey within 7 days of receipt, that will help me a lot.

Thank you.

Conrade YAP (kianseng)
Doctoral Candidate
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dec 2011
* Required

(A) YOUR INFORMATION

In the report, your name will be abbreviated by using first letters. For example, Jane Doe will be rendered as JD.

Your Name (Firstname, Lastname) *

Your names will appear in my report only as initials.

Name of Church *

(If you do not attend any Church, type NONE)

Describe your religious affiliation *

(If you do not have any, type NONE)

(B) PERSPECTIVES OF THE SABBATH

In this section, questions will be asked regarding your thoughts and ideas surrounding the topic of Sabbath keeping, or Sunday worship or simply resting a day a week.

1) How Much Do You Know About the Sabbath? *

☐ A Lot

☐ A Little

☐ Not At All

☐ Other:

2) Muslims observe the Juma on Friday. Jews observe Sabbath on Saturday. Christians go to church on Sundays. Due to the closeness of Judaism and Christianity, do you think Sunday is the Christian "Sabbath"? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

☐ Other:

3) The Sabbath is for Jews. It does not apply to Christians. Do you agree? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

☐ Other:

4) What do you BELIEVE is the purpose of the Sabbath? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ Just rest (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual)
☐ For personal leisure and relaxation
☐ Day to catch up on work
☐ Not Sure

☐ Other:

5) Of the Ten Commandments, some theologians have wondered why people observe some like (no murder, no adultery, etc). Yet the 4th Commandment on Sabbath keeping is often ignored. Do you agree? Why? *

(C) PERSONAL PRACTICES

In this section, the research aims to take a snapshot on how the rest day is practiced on a regular basis.

6) Which is true for you? *

Check ALL that applies

- ☐ Too much work
☐ Not Enough Work
☐ Don't Know How to Rest
☐ Even If I allocate a day to rest, I don't know what to do with it.
☐ Tend to be Restless even on a Rest Day

☐ Other:

7) Do you personally practice the Sabbath or Keep a Day a week for some kind of rest? Why or why not? *

(Note: It can be any day per week.)

8) What is your weekly PRACTICE of the rest day? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ Just rest (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual)
- ☐ For personal leisure and relaxation
- ☐ An extra Day to catch up on work
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Other:

9) Do you think that your Church (or community) should have more teaching on Sabbath keeping especially in our crazy, noisy and busy world? *

- ☐ Yes. More teaching please
- ☐ No thanks. I've had too much teaching and no time.
- ☐ I'm not sure.
- ☐ No way. I'm not a Jew, so Sabbath is not for me.
- ☐ Other:

10) If you can design your perfect rest day, what will it look like? *

Name at least three activities (starting with the most important to the least)

11) What are the CHALLENGES for sticking to a 1 rest day a week regimen? *

check all that apply

- ☐ Technology is always ON (emails, cellphones, Internet, etc)
- ☐ Busy Lifestyle
- ☐ Too much work, too little time feeling
- ☐ Family Responsibilities
- ☐ Too much work in the office
- ☐ Inner restlessness
- ☐ My nature of work is erratic. (eg on call 24x7)
- ☐ Other:

12) Which attitude closely represents yours? *

check all that apply

- ☐ Sunday is just like any other ordinary day.
- ☐ Sunday is important because I gather with fellow believers in Church
- ☐ Any day can be a Sabbath day for me
- ☐ I don't believe in Sabbath keeping
- ☐ Sabbath? That's new.
- ☐ I want to rest. Teach me how to rest.
- ☐ Other:

13) Do you believe that there is something MORE to Sabbath keeping than simply taking a break once a week? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Other:

14) Suppose you are convinced that the Sabbath is MORE than simply a rest day, will you make a special effort to observe it regularly? *

1 2 3 4 5

Absolutely! ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Nope!

15) How important is it to observe a 24-hour Rest day per week? *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Not Important

16) If you cannot have a 24-hour day rest, what is your alternative? *

Eg. Some people practice a 'rhythm' of rest rather than a literal 24-hour day.

17) What do you normally do on a Sunday (or any other rest day)? *

If you go to Church, do include both before and after church activities if possible.

18) How disciplined are you with regards to Sabbath keeping? *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Disciplined ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very lax

19) When was the last time you have enjoyed a Sabbatical moment, or a great restful time? Describe. *

20) Assuming you practice the Sabbath, which benefit appeal MOST to you? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ More Informed Intellectually
- ☐ Deeper Restfulness
- ☐ Fighting Addiction to Work
- ☐ Discerning Needs from Wants
- ☐ Better Idea of Your Spiritual Journey
- ☐ Manage my Life Better
- ☐ Other:

4) PRACTICUM

Beyond mere resting. This section comprises questions that look forward toward plans and practicums to implement a Sabbath rest and rhythm for the community.

21) If there is a curriculum to teach Sabbath keeping in Church or in a community, how interested will you be? *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Interested. I'll even pay for it. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Not Interested

22) The Sabbath gives us a glimpse of the heavenly rest. Do you agree? *

- ☐ Yes. I agree.
- ☐ No. Sabbath is just for physical rest. After all, it's made for man right?
- ☐ Oh. That's new to me.
- ☐ I'm not sure.
- ☐ Other:

23) Clergy, pastors, ministers, and certain professionals tend to work long hours. Sometimes they have to work 7 days a week for a long time. What can you do to support such people? *

24) With technology use on the rise, what do you think about the practice of a technological Sabbath? (For example: one day a week, disconnect) *

answer according to how willing you are to practise that

25) Do you need help in keeping the Sabbath? *

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure
☐ Other:

26) Which best represents the Sabbath keeping attitude in your community? *

1 2 3 4 5

Legalistic ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Totally Free

27) Being intentional is increasingly an essential spiritual discipline. In our busy world, it is getting more important for us to establish a sense of rhythm in work and rest. If there is a way to be intentional about Sabbath keeping, how interested are you personally? How keen will you be in participating in a program for your Church? *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Keen ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Not Keen

28) Which activity that best represents Sabbath keeping? *

Choose one only

- ☐ For worship
☐ For purification
☐ For relationship building
☐ For personal rest
☐ Don't Know
☐ Other:

29) If you want to find out more about the Sabbath, where do you go to? *

Check all that apply

- ☐ My Pastor
☐ Professor / Teacher
☐ Friends
☐ Books
☐ The Internet
☐ Other:

30) Additional Thoughts You May Have After Completing this Survey.

Feel free to add anything. This section is for you to input anything for me to research and to address at a future time.

Submit

APPENDIX C – PROPOSED PREACHING SCHEDULE

Week 1 – A Biblical and Theological Survey of the Sabbath

Week 2 – Problems and Promises of the Sabbath Keeping

Week 3 – What the Sabbath means for Modern Times

Week 4 – What do we do on the Sabbath?

Week 5 – The Sabbath as a Ladder of Trust

APPENDIX D – SUMMARY OF RESULTS

11 responses

Summary [See complete responses](#)

(A) YOUR INFORMATION

In the report, your name will be abbreviated by using first letters. For example, Jane Doe will be rendered as JD.

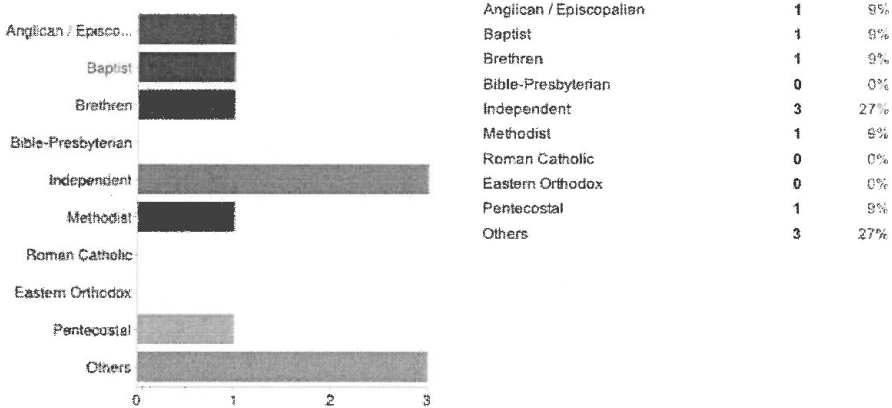
Your Name (Firstname, Lastname)

Joseph Chin Philip Chan Monte Lee Rice Liu Fook Tim Goh Eek Kheng Mary Lim Mark Rajan Jenny Wong Tuck Fang
Lim Jabez Tan chiew peng, chus

Name of Church

Church of Singapore (MP) Lord's Peace chapel Home fellowship Cornerstone Community Church Covenant Community Methodist Church,
Singapore Lord's Peace Chapel Grace Community Baptist Church St Andrew's Cath ...

Describe your religious affiliation

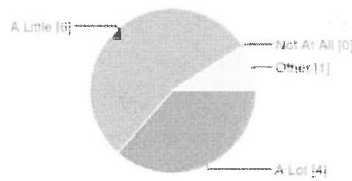


(B) PERSPECTIVES OF THE SABBATH

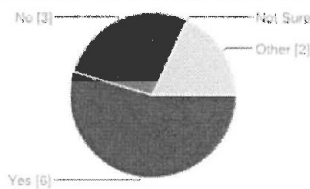
In this section, questions will be asked regarding your thoughts and ideas surrounding the topic of Sabbath keeping, or Sunday worship or simply resting a day a week.

1) How Much Do You Know About the Sabbath?

A Lot	4	36%
A Little	6	55%
Not At All	0	0%
Other	1	9%

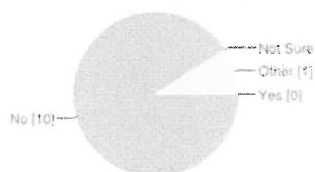


2) Muslims observe the Juma on Friday, Jews observe Sabbath on Saturday, Christians go to church on Sundays. Due to the closeness of Judaism and Christianity, do you think Sunday is the Christian 'Sabbath'?



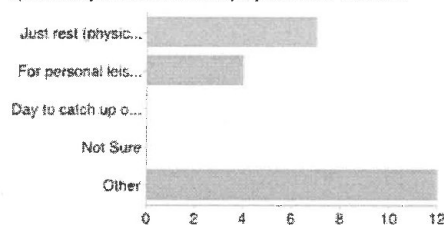
Yes	6	55%
No	3	27%
Not Sure	0	0%
Other	2	18%

3) The Sabbath is for Jews. It does not apply to Christians. Do you agree?



Yes	0	0%
No	10	91%
Not Sure	0	0%
Other	1	9%

4) What do you BELIEVE is the purpose of the Sabbath?



Just rest (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual)	7	64%
For personal leisure and relaxation	4	36%
Day to catch up on work	0	0%
Not Sure	0	0%
Other	12	109%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

5) Of the Ten Commandments, some theologians have wondered why people observe some like (no murder, no adultery, etc). Yet the 4th Commandment on Sabbath keeping is often ignored. Do you agree? Why?

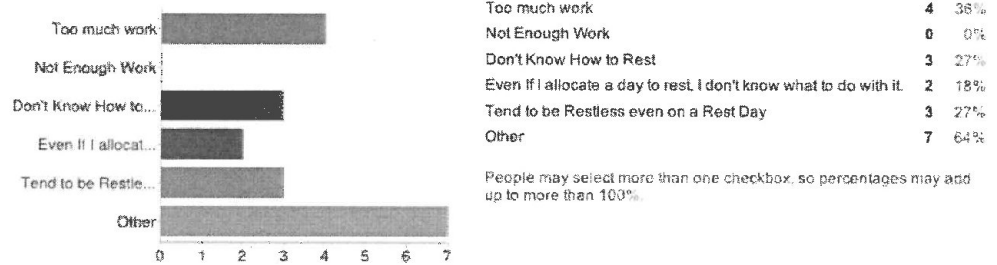
No, Christians do not believe they "ignored" the Sabbath because they believe they keep it on Sunday instead of Saturday. I do not think most true believers ignore the Christian Sabbath i.e. Sunday. They go to church but they may go for different reasons other than worshipping God. They do take a day off from work and rest, either spending time with the family or engaging in some recreational sports. Those who do not go to church have their own reasons for not going. They may not believe in institutional church or they may not find the messages helpful. They may be turned off by what

they see ...

(C) PERSONAL PRACTICES

In this section, the research aims to take a snapshot on how the rest day is practiced on a regular basis.

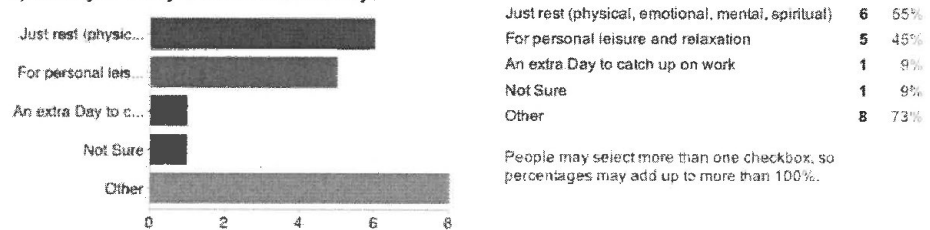
6) Which is true for you?



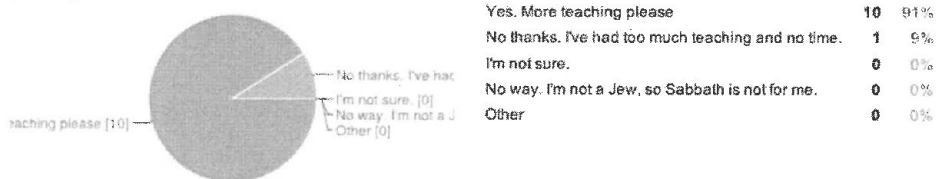
7) Do you personally practice the Sabbath or Keep a Day a week for some kind of rest? Why or why not?

I do in obedience to God's clear commandment in the Creation Mandate and the Ten Commandments. Yes, I do. However, my rest does not mean I do nothing. When I was actively engaging in my dental practice, my rest on Sunday was a rest from what I did during the week. However, I worshiped, I served, I spent time with my family and I played tennis if possible. In my retirement, there is really much a difference from one day to another. However, being able to worship with other believers and have fellowship with them means a lot to me on the Rest Day. Not a full day but I try to set aside some bloc ...

8) What is your weekly PRACTICE of the rest day?



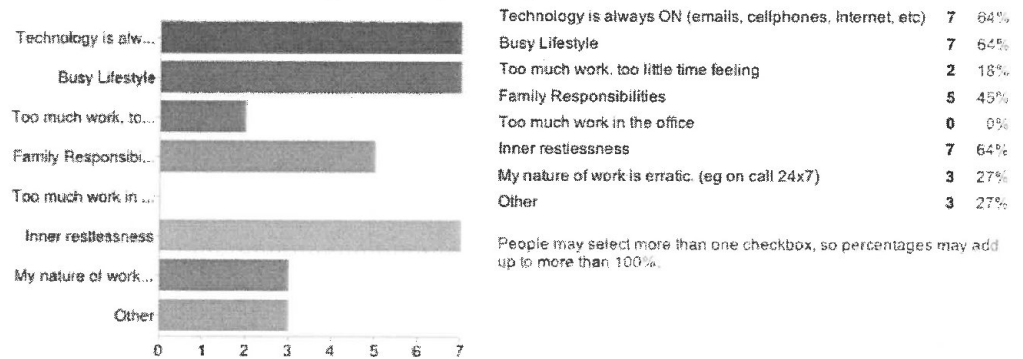
9) Do you think that your Church (or community) should have more teaching on Sabbath keeping especially in our crazy, noisy and busy world?



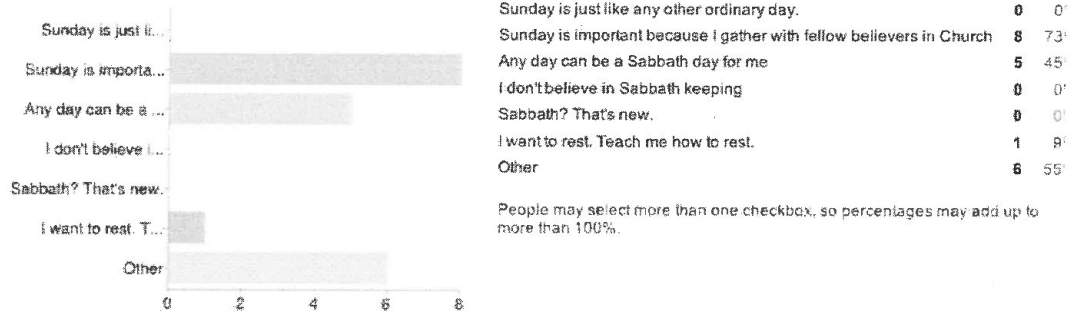
10) If you can design your perfect rest day, what will it look like?

(1) Family meal with friends invited. (2) Learn something new, e.g. visit a museum, or visit a new place. (3) Visit & catch up with someone. (4) Help someone in need. 1. Instead of rushing early to church, I will have time and more time to spend in my devotion. 2. To have meaningful time of worship and fellowship with other believers. 3. To spend time with my wife and family. Bible reading Walk in forest. Getting still before God. Time for corporate worship. Time with the family - typically a meal together or some other family activity eg Shopping games. Sundays spent worshipping and having fun

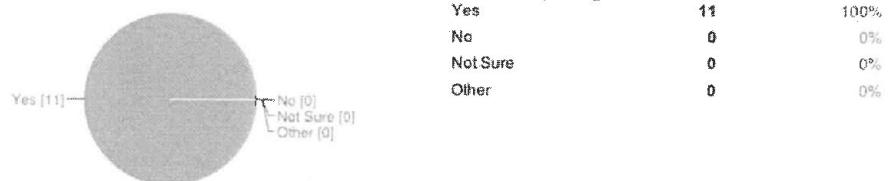
11) What are the CHALLENGES for sticking to a 1 rest day a week regimen?



12) Which attitude closely represents yours?

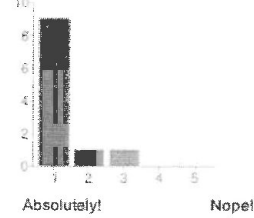


13) Do you believe that there is something MORE to Sabbath keeping than simply taking a break once a week?



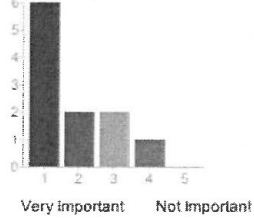
14) Suppose you are convinced that the Sabbath is MORE than simply a rest day, will you make a special effort to observe it

regularly?



1 - Absolutely!	9	82%
2	1	9%
3	1	9%
4	0	0%
5 - Nope!	0	0%

15) How important is it to observe a 24-hour Rest day per week?



1 - Very important	6	55%
2	2	18%
3	2	18%
4	1	9%
5 - Not important	0	0%

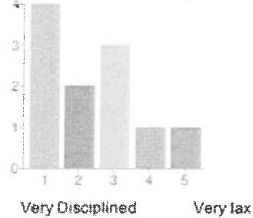
16) If you cannot have a 24-hour day rest, what is your alternative?

Design a pattern of rest-routine and commit to it. The key is keeping the pattern. But at the same time always seeking ways to achieve the full Sabbath routine whenever possible. The full Sabbath should be the desired end state. As I said, in my retirement every day can be regarded as my Rest Day as I am not burdened by work or activities. However, Sunday is special. blocks of time to get alone with God. Due to work and other commitments, there will always be interference on certain Sundays. We can always make up for it another week. Evenings spent with family and relaxing activity, Mid-week tel ...

17) What do you normally do on a Sunday (or any other rest day)?

Sunday is Church, follow by fellowship, and if necessary resume work. My "serious" rest day is the Biblical Sabbath as described earlier. As I said, rushing early to church does rob me of my time needed for my devotion. After church, the fellowship with others for lunch is most enjoyable and meaningful. After lunch, it is time for a short nap and then a time to read God's word and to pray. I usually like to spend an hour of practice at the driving range and then spend the rest of the evening with my wife or to prepare for the weekly Bible studies. Prayer, Read Bible. Any leisure activity. We go ...

18) How disciplined are you with regards to Sabbath keeping?

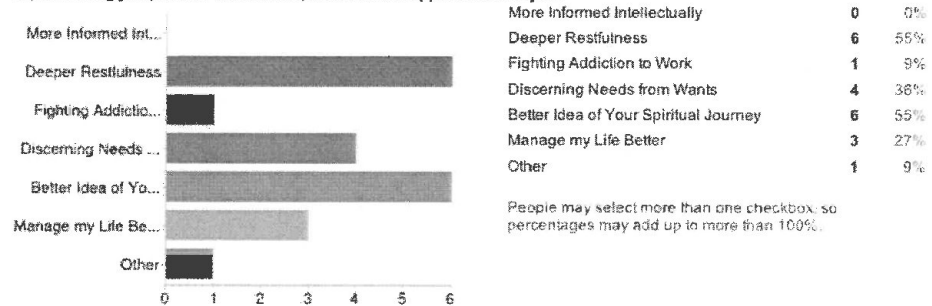


1 - Very Disciplined	4	36%
2	2	18%
3	3	27%
4	1	9%
5 - Very lax	1	9%

19) When was the last time you have enjoyed a Sabbatical moment, or a great restful time? Describe.

Every 7th day of the week, i.e. Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. If you define Sabbatical moment in terms of 24 hour/day in which I do nothing but to meditate before the Lord, I have not had any. However, if it is a time within a day, I have had it often when I spend hours reading and meditating His Word and in prayer. This is the moment I treasure and enjoy most. Last week. We spent the Sunday evening enjoying some board games with the family. Last Sunday three years ago, when I go on a personal retreat to Abbey. Don't have to worry about cooking, hubby, kids, housework, work, just soak in ...

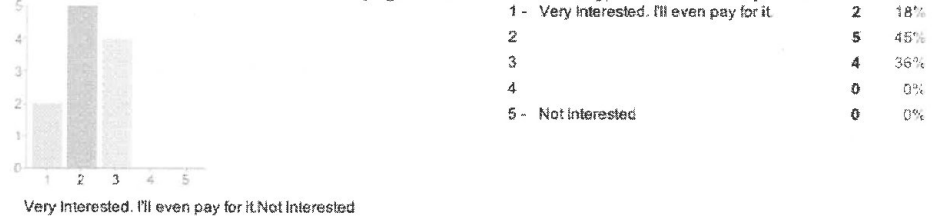
20) Assuming you practice the Sabbath, which benefit appeal MOST to you?



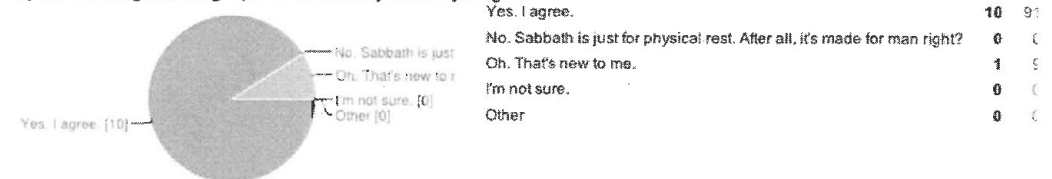
4) PRACTICUM

Beyond mere resting. This section comprises questions that look forward toward plans and practicum to implement a Sabbath rest and rhythm for the community.

21) If there is a curriculum to teach Sabbath keeping in Church or in a community, how interested will you be?



22) The Sabbath gives us a glimpse of the heavenly rest. Do you agree?



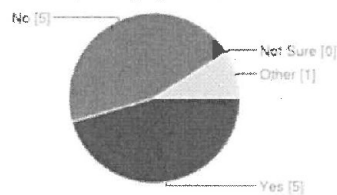
23) Clergy, pastors, ministers, and certain professionals tend to work long hours. Sometimes they have to work 7 days a week for a long time. What can you do to support such people?

Long hours is no issue. Keeping the Sabbath holy (separate from the other 6 days) is the issue. I would like to help others first form a Biblical concept of the Sabbath. Whether the individual can keep it as faithfully as possible is something each of us have to work out according to our conviction, level of faith, and station in life. They have to know (most of them do know) that without proper rest, their health will deteriorate, their mind will not function properly and their spiritual life will suffer. Workaholic is an addiction, they enjoy what they do and they do not see why they should stop.

24) With technology use on the rise, what do you think about the practice of a technological Sabbath? (For example: one day a week, disconnect)

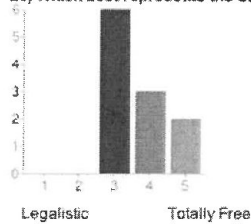
Absolutely needed. The Sabbath is also given to counter human-drivenness. It is a good idea. Years ago we did not have computer and cell phone and yet we survived. I am for it. I am not comfortable with the idea. Rest may not necessarily be abstinence from technology. I find it restful to catch up with friends through email, facebook on Sundays or my rest day. Also, catching up with articles, etc are often done through technology. That is a new idea worth thinking about. no problem. I think it is a good idea to disconnect the internet and put away the computer. Perhaps turning off the TV will contribute.

25) Do you need help in keeping the Sabbath?



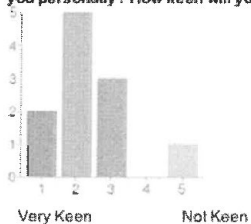
Yes	5	45%
No	5	45%
Not Sure	0	0%
Other	1	9%

26) Which best represents the Sabbath keeping attitude in your community?



1 - Legalistic	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	6	65%
4	3	27%
5 - Totally Free	2	18%

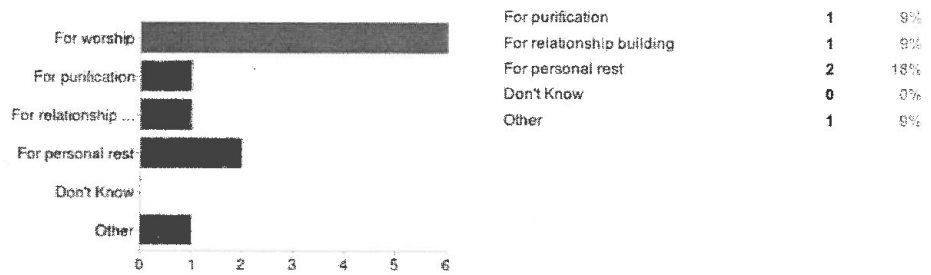
27) Being intentional is increasingly an essential spiritual discipline. In our busy world, it is getting more important for us to establish a sense of rhythm in work and rest. If there is a way to be intentional about Sabbath keeping, how interested are you personally? How keen will you be in participating in a program for your Church?



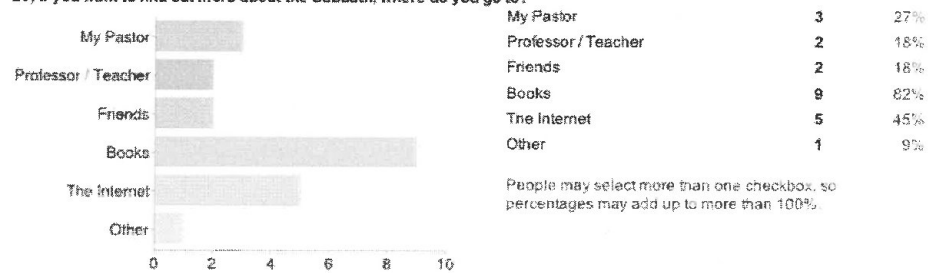
1 - Very Keen	2	18%
2	5	45%
3	3	27%
4	0	0%
5 - Not Keen	1	9%

28) Which activity that best represents Sabbath keeping?

For worship	6	55%
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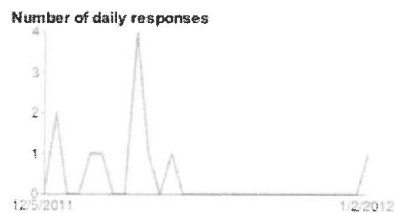


29) If you want to find out more about the Sabbath, where do you go to?



30) Additional Thoughts You May Have After Completing this Survey.

Sabbath-keeping is a Biblical idea and command that the Church has modified (by moving the day) and over time largely neglected. This is a natural progression, i.e. once man can change something which God commanded, there is no stop how our "intelligent" mind can justify other changes, thus resulting in a command becoming a suggestion. The Bible also speaks very little on "how to practice" the Sabbath, i.e. very little guidelines, except to "do no work" and Jesus' example of "doing good and save life." Therefore, it seems that God's sole purpose is for those who trust and obey Him in keeping ...



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